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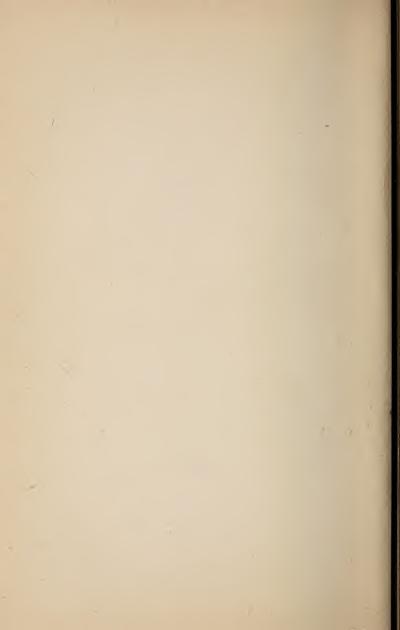
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.









# AT THE THRESHOLD:

Familian Talks with Young Chnistians

CONCERNING

### DOCTRINES AND DUTIES.

BY

REV. ROSS C. HOUGHTON, D. D.,

AUTHOR OF "WOMEN OF THE ORIENT," ETC.



CINCINNATI:
WALDEN AND STOWE.
NEW YORK: PHILLIPS & HUNT.
1881.

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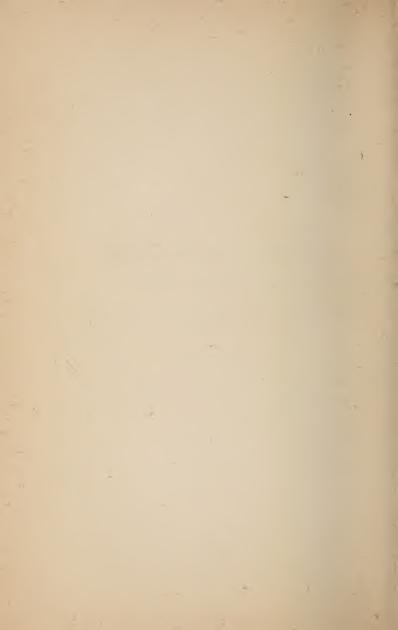
# My Beloved Children in the Gospel,

WITH AN EARNEST PRAYER

THAT THEY MAY "KEEP THAT WHICH IS COMMITTED TO THEIR TRUST,"

This Little Volume

IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.



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## AT THE THRESHOLD.

## Chapter I.

#### FIRST WORDS.

"How can they live, how will they die,

How bear the cross of grief,

Who have not got the light of faith,

The courage of belief?" —FABER.

In the city of Rome the traveler is shown a chamber, the ceiling and walls and floor of which are frescoed in the most irregular and fantastic manner. There seems to be no harmony, no unity of design in the strange conception of the artist. Bewildered and disappointed, you are about to turn away, when the cicerone leads you to a particular point near one end of the saloon, and instantly your dissatisfaction gives place to a sensation of exquisite pleasure; for, as you look, the grand design of the painter flashes at once upon you. The perspective is perfect, every line has a meaning, every panel has a place, every figure adds to the finish of the work. Instinctively you recognize the hand of a master, and yield yourself to the delightful influence of his genius.

Human life is like that ancient chamber. To the

uninstructed observer it is a scene of mystery and confusion; and, even if for a moment he catches a glimpse of order and beauty, one more flash of the varying light throws it all into hopeless disorder again. History, science, philosophy, afford but little relief, even to the most devoted student.

One is sure to miss the meaning of all that he is, and all that he sees, unless with a teachable spirit he permits the Divine Guide to lead him to the one stand-point whence God's real purpose in our creation may be discovered, and the glory of his design may be comprehended. Standing here, there is no more mystery; no more confusion; no more disappointment. Every thing has a complete and satisfactory meaning. All is light, and harmony, and beauty.

Young Christian! You have now, for the first time, gained that focal point of correct observation—the stand-point of *Christian faith*. With all my heart I wish you joy, and bid you Godspeed; for now you have really begun to learn. You feel your ignorance, you realize your inexperience in spiritual things; but you have chosen a skillful teacher—a safe counselor.

You can never make any serious mistakes so long as you practically heed the instruction: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."

If your experience is in any wise Scriptural, you are already conscious that God has called you to a new

LIFE. The Holy Spirit has engaged in no work of remodeling your former life. He has applied no moral varnish to cover the imperfections of your character. His work is more thorough, more radical, because it is divine. He has given you a new life; he has called you to a new vision, and a new work. To worldly philosophy, something less than this might suffice; but God's philosophy of salvation involves just this: a new creation, a regeneration, the impartation of a new life.

"A Scotch girl, converted under the preaching of Whitefield, being asked if her heart was changed, gave the following beautiful answer: 'Something, I know, is changed; it may be the world, it may be my heart. There is a great change somewhere, I am sure, for every thing is different from what it once was."

It is easy to see the radical difference between a mere moralist and a live Christian. Looking out of my study window one morning in the month of March, I saw a cherry tree covered from root to tallest tip with sparkling ice. It was a beautiful sight! How pure it looked! Well, the moralist is like that tree: white, but cold. Negatively good; wearing, at best, an outside adornment. The true Christian is like the same tree when the real vital forces begin to act in the Spring and Summer time; first the green leaves, then the flowers, and lastly the fruit. A positive goodness! A true inner life, working out its permanent, satisfying results. His is not a beauty

which vanishes in a day; but a sturdy excellence which shall be eternal!

You might find a great deal of fault with him if you should try. He don't set himself up as a model; Christ is the model—what fault have you to find with Christ? Sometimes this Christian's fruit is imperfect, and he shows the need of more culture; but the right principle is at work; there's life in him, and if he holds on to Christ, he shall grow in grace, and in knowledge, and in worth. There's a new life in him; and, in due time, the world will get the benefit of it.

Just how the Holy Spirit has operated in producing this change I can not tell; you can not tell. You are the same individual you were before; but "old things are passed away; behold all things are become new." Your faculties are all renovated, so that they work harmoniously in fulfilling the true end of your being. It is enough for you to be fully conscious of the change itself; the how of that change will probably forever remain a mystery to you.

For all that God hath wrought in you you ought devoutly to praise him; but let me remind you that your new life is just begun. It is to be a life of development; a life fitly illustrated by our Lord's beautiful simile: "First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." The peculiar difficulties which are to aid in disciplining and developing you, are yet to be met. You have, also, a great work before you, but a great power is pledged to your support. You will need clear conceptions of the world, of

the doctrines you have received, of the distinctive polity of the Church you have chosen as your home, and of the duties and privileges of your new position.

In the spirit of Christian love and sympathy I extend to you a friendly hand; and, in the following pages, shall aim to give you such particular counsel and instruction as a young Christian most needs; relying upon the Holy Spirit to remedy all defects, either in the matter or the manner of my work.

The dew of the morning still rests upon your new life. The hour of your conversion has but just passed. Its unspeakable ecstasy still lingers in your soul. I rejoice with you. Let us pause together; and while, by the mysterious bonds of Christian fellowship, we are joined in spirit with one of God's glorified saints, let us sing:

"There is a spot to me more dear
Than native vale or mountain;
A spot for which affection's tear
Springs grateful from its fountain;
"T is not where kindred souls abound,
Though that were almost heaven;
But where I first my Savior found,
And felt my sins forgiven.

Hard was my toil to reach the shore,
Long tossed upon the ocean;
Above me was the thunder's roar,
Beneath the wave's commotion.
Darkly the pall of night was thrown
Around me, faint with terror;
In that dark hour how did my groan
Ascend for years of error!

Sinking and panting as for breath,
I knew not hope was near me;
I cried, O save me, Lord, from death!
Immortal Jesus, hear me!
Then quick as thought I felt him mine;
My Savior stood before me;
I saw his brightness round me shine,
And shouted, Glory! glory!

O sacred hour, O hallowed spot,
Where love divine first found me!
Wherever falls my distant lot,
My heart will linger round thee;
And when from earth I rise to soar
Up to my home in heaven,
Down will I cast my eyes once more
Where I was first forgiven."
—Dr. WILLIAM HUNTER.

### Chapter II.

#### IN THE CHURCH.

"One family, we dwell in him,
One Church above, beneath,
Though now divided by the stream,
The narrow stream of death.
One army of the living God,
To his command we bow;
Part of his host have crossed the flood,
And part are crossing now."
—Charles Wesley.

"WHERE the Spirit of God is, there is the Church." The Church is perpetuated solely by the indwelling Spirit. Spiritual life and fellowship are primary and essential; outward organization is secondary. The organization is not the life, it is simply a manifestation of the life; and its sole importance is found in the fact that it promotes the spiritual growth of its members, and "facilitates the perform-

The unity of the Church is the unity of the Spirit. Christ established the general Church, called the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven; and whoever is a "new creature" in Christ, whoever submits fully to his governing will, is in his kingdom, is a member of his Church.

ance of their Church work."

The different denominations, which now "provoke one another unto love and to good works," are entirely man-made, so far as their distinctive characteristics are concerned; and are, in reality, simply the exponents of different views as to the best forms of Church fellowship and Church work. "As the different oceans, called by different names, form one body, so the different denominations of Christians form one Church."

All evangelical denominations are agreed as to the fundamental doctrines of Christianity; while, in these days of light and love, they "agree to disagree" only about less important doctrines and forms of Church organization.

Therefore, the only question for a young Christian to ask, as regards Church membership, is, "Where can I feel most at home, and work to the best advantage? What particular organization is best adapted to my particular tastes and talents, to help me and enable me to help others most?" Having found that home, there should the young Christian abide, studying carefully its methods, and making the most of himself in the particular department to which he finds himself best adapted. If congenial in tastes and belief, it is obviously best for a young Christian to join that Church through the instrumentality of which he was converted.

Of course, there are flowers and fruits not inside any of these denominational gardens, and they often afford a most refreshing contrast to the dreariness of the moral wilderness in which they are found. But they are exposed to many dangers, and grow up against many disadvantages unknown to those inside the wall; and, besides, they miss the cultivation, the pruning, the training, the watching, and tending so essential to the most perfect growth and fruitfulness. A good tree will be worth most in a prepared, protected garden, where there is the most that is favorable, and the least that is unfavorable, to its development. Therefore, young Christian, get at once into the organized Church, and stay there!

Once in the Church, all the privileges of such an association belong to you in kind, though perhaps not in degree. A mature tree, with innumerable roots striking down deep into the soil, and wide-spread branches, covered with broad leaves, which lay ample tribute upon the air and the moisture and the sunshine, will, of course, get more out of its surroundings than a young tree just transplanted from the nursery; but it will get nothing better, and has no essential rights which do not belong equally to its tender neighbor. Be modest, be of a teachable spirit; do not overrate your worth to the Church, but resolve in the beginning not to suffer yourself in any way, or for any reason, to be deprived of a single Church privilege which will conduce to your rapid and thorough development. You are a child beloved, and a joint heir in the household, although you may be the youngest of the group.

Having identified yourself with a particular denomination, let your first principle of action be loyalty.

While you bid all other branches of the Church Godspeed, have the warmest love and the clearest head for your own denomination. You can scarcely set too high an estimate upon your Church relations. Never speak against the Church; never listen to the reproaches of others. If there are unworthy members, consider that they are exceptions, and by no means lessen the value of all that is good and Christlike in your surroundings. The defects of denominational organization only show its human origin, while its excellences abundantly mark the Divine approval, and call you to a steady development, which you are to permit none of these adventitious circumstances to hinder. If you observe evils in the Church, or honestly believe that certain modifications should be made in her polity, set yourself to accomplish the needed reform in the true spirit of brotherly love, determined (except where matters of principle and conscience are involved) quietly to submit to the godly judgment of your brethren, where your opinion and theirs seem to conflict. Remember there is a vast difference between a reformer and a rebel!

Let your second principle be consecration. Give all there is of you to God and the Church. Let no single power of your being be reserved. "Pay thy vows unto the Lord!" Never fall into the habit, so common with worldly Christians, of discriminating between the promises made to the Church and those made to your associates. Sacredly keep all your pledges.

At every point in your Christian life you are bound, in all honesty, to say: "All there is of me belongs now to the Church." If you have come to be worth any more than when you first gave your hand to the Church, she is fairly entitled to all the advantage of it. Says Hans Christian Andersen of Jenny Lind, in his "Story of My Life:" "On one occasion only did I hear her express her joy in her talent, and her selfconsciousness. It was during her last residence in Copenhagen. Almost every evening she appeared at concerts; every hour was in requisition. She heard of a society, the object of which was to assist unfortunate children; to take them out of the hands of their parents, by whom they were misused, and compelled either to beg or steal. . . . 'Let me,' said she, 'give a night's performance for the benefit of these poor children; but we will have double prices.' Such a performance was given, and returned large proceeds. When she was informed of this, and that by this means a number of poor children would be benefited for several years, her countenance beamed, and the tears filled her eyes. 'Is it not beautiful,' said she, 'that I can sing so?' Through her I first became sensible of the holiness there is in art; through her I learned that one must forget one's self in the service of the Supreme."

In like manner, young Christian, learn to value your powers, not so much for the pleasure or the profit they may bring to you, as for their availability in the service of the Church; always remember that in no other relations could they possibly be worth as much to the world and the cause of humanity. Never suffer yourself to be like the barnacles which simply cling to the bottom of the ship, retarding its progress and adding to its burden; be, rather, like the broad sail, which, under the direction of a skillful master, may be readily trimmed to catch every favoring breeze, thus constantly speeding the good ship on her journey. Some Churches are actually burdened by unemployed talent, while others are "dying of proprieties." You are commanded to be "instant in season and out of season," serving God and the Church with all your powers; and if you continue to be obedient, you will not only do nothing to perpetuate these vital hinderances, but will do much to destroy or counteract them.

Lastly, make it your business worthily to illustrate before the world the truth preached in your Church. "Preach the Word!" is the pastor's great commission; "Be ye doers of the Word," is the command laid upon the people and the pastor alike. Dr. Lyman Beecher used to say: "The reason why my ministry was so blessed to the salvation of men, was that I had so many pulpit reflectors in the Christians who lived out, and diffused in every practical way, the Gospel which I proclaimed."

### Chapter III.

#### REPENTANCE.

"Come, come to his feet and lay open your story
Of suffering and sorrow, of guilt and of shame;
For the pardon of sin is the crown of his glory,
And the joy of our Lord to be true to his name."

—FABER.

NE evening, long after Dr. Samuel Johnson had reached the zenith of his literary fame, he said to his hostess: "Madam, I beg your pardon for the abruptness of my departure in the morning, but I was compelled to it by conscience. Fifty years ago, madam, on this day, I committed a breach of filial piety. My father had been in the habit of attending Uttoxeter market, and opening a stall there for the sale of his books. Confined by indisposition, he desired me, that day, to go and attend the stall in his place. My pride prevented me; I gave my father a refusal. And now, to-day, I have been at Uttoxeter; I went into the market at the time of business, uncovered my head, and stood with it bare for an hour, on the spot where my father's stall used to stand. contrition I stood, and I hope the penance was expiatory." Thomas Carlyle says of this event: "The picture of Samuel Johnson standing bareheaded in the market there, is one of the grandest and saddest we can paint. 'Repentance! Repentance!' he proclaims, as with passionate sobs; but only to the ear of heaven, if heaven will give him audience; the earthly ear and heart that should have heard it, are now closed, unresponsive forever." Although we can not echo his hope that "the penance was expiatory"—still, we recognize the elements of a genuine repentance in this memorable act of the Christian philosopher, whose tender heart constantly revealed itself, in one form or other, through the eccentricities of his rugged character. Good men love the memory of Samuel Johnson, because they love honesty.

True repentance is *honest* repentance before God. St. Paul makes it clear to us when he says: "Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death."

An ingenuous man will readily acknowledge that he is a sinner; but too often even his repentance is a "sorrow of the world," which he would fain make himself believe is religious, and therefore acceptable to God.

Some sinners repent in the line of respectability. They know that flagrant acts of immorality are not countenanced by the best society, and that they who indulge in such things must expect social ostracism. Perhaps already they are familiar with the bitterness of being under the ban of refined and cultivated circles; and they are sorry for and resolved to abandon their wicked courses, simply because of the inconvenience and disgrace which attend them. Some repent

to the confidence of men, that they may secure positions of trust and honor; and some repent to the immutable laws of the best business circles, never suffering their eyes to become so dimmed by the tears of contrition that they shall, even for a moment, lose sight of the "main chance." The repentance of others partakes more of the nature of fear than sorrow—fear of men; fear of God; fear of present consequences; fear of hell.

Still others, having drained to the very dregs the cup of worldly pleasure, are ready, with the little earnestness of which their jaded souls are yet capable, to accept the final sentiment of Hawthorne's characteristic description of the Roman Coliseum, and the great black cross that then stood in the amphitheater: "That black cross marks one of the special blood spots of the earth, where thousands of times over the dying gladiator fell, and more of human agony has been endured, for the mere pastime of the multitude. than on the breadth of many battle-fields. From all this crime and suffering, however, the spot has derived a more than common sanctity. An inscription promises seven years' indulgence, seven years of remission from the pains of purgatory, and earlier enjoyment of heavenly bliss, for each separate kiss imprinted on the black cross. What better use could be made of life, after middle age, when the accumulated sins are many and the remaining temptations few, than to spend it all in kissing the black cross of the Coliseum!"

All this is dishonest repentance—"sorrow of the world," the apostle calls it—and if it leads to an abandonment of evil pursuits, it is more on account of disgust, disappointment, misfortune, the bitterness of affliction, or leanness of purse, than because of any falling out with sin itself, as corrupting and debasing, as well as an offense before God and good men.

"Godly sorrow"—or a sorrow according to God—is a very different thing from the shuffling sentimentalism that we have been considering. Godly sorrow for sin is radical. It is conceived by the Holy Ghost, and born of the innermost convictions of the human soul. It is, in the most exalted sense, manly and honest.

True repentance is something more than a mere selfish grief, which prompts you to forget God and remember only yourself. True repentance means "a displeasure of soul," resulting from the influence of the Word and the Spirit of God; it means a correct understanding of our natural corruption and our actual transgressions; a just sense of God's hatred of sin; a most intense loathing of sin; a genuine sorrow for sin; an unreserved confession of sin; all followed by a profound desire for freedom from its power, culminating in a resolute determination, by God's grace, to let it alone.

Too often even what seems to be genuine repentance is fitly represented by the following picture of Roman piety: "In Italy, religion jostles along side by side with business and sport, after a fashion of its own; and people are accustomed to kneel down and pray, or see others praying, between two fits of merriment, or between two sins." Palmer says: "Repentance without amendment is like continual pumping in a ship without stopping the leaks. In real repentance the heart is broken for sin and from sin." True repentance is chiefly a matter between the soul and God, without much reference to others, and it involves the impressive thought that God "looketh upon the heart," and that we can only hope for his mercy as we are strictly sincere in approaching him.

Young Christian, let me ask you a few plain questions! Have you been made sick of sin, not merely on account of the inconvenience and disgrace which attend it, but because of itself as sin? Have you felt deeply dissatisfied with yourself for having sinned against God? Have you, with "a broken and contrite heart," come to God confessing your sins? Has your grief, on account of sin, prompted you, publicly and secretly, to avoid it as you would a deadly poison? Have you put from you your sins and evil acts, and applied yourself to acts of righteousness?

If to these questions you can answer yes, you may rest assured that you have truly repented, and that, through faith in Christ, you may safely claim forgiveness for all your sins. You may be peacefully satisfied of this, although you may have had no excess of feeling—shedding no tears, uttering no groans—for repentance is not a matter of feeling but of principle. You may be peacefully satisfied of this whether

you have been penitent one moment or one year, for since repentance does not wipe out sin and reinstate us in the favor of God, but simply makes us sick of sin and fills us with a sincere longing for the remedy, it can not possibly be estimated by the time of its continuance.

The grace of true repentance is not self-produced, but springs up in the honest heart through the direct influence of the Holy Spirit. This fact is almost self-evident. Men are naturally so thoroughly in love with sin, so strongly impelled toward wrong-doing, and find it so utterly impossible to turn short about and by sheer force of will realize their depravity and begin to hate what they have loved, that when they carefully think upon this subject they must almost inevitably see that they need the intervention of a supernatural, a divine power, in order to a Scriptural penitence. All this harmonizes with the Scriptural affirmation that God gives to men repentance as well as remission of sins. (Acts v, 31; xi, 18; 2 Tim. ii, 25; Matt. ix, 13; Zech. xii, 10.)

By their fruits ye shall know them. Therefore young Christians are not left without an authoritative guide to assist them in carefully applying a satisfactory test to their experience. (See 2 Cor. vii, 11.) The fruits of true repentance are: 1. Consciousness of guilt. 2. Sorrow for sin. 3. Renunciation of sin. 4. Confession of sin. 5. Restitution. Especially let me emphasize the last evidence. Zaccheus, realizing his sinfulness in the light of the divine presence, and

being truly penitent, said: "If I have taken any thing from any man, by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." And Jesus said unto him: "This day is salvation come to this house." Of course we can make no restitution to God; but, where the wrong has been toward our fellow and restitution is practicable, true repentance will most certainly prompt us to make it.

If we are truly penitent, we shall bring forth these "fruits meet for repentance." We shall be honest with ourselves, honest with our fellow-men, honest with our God. Christ will plead for us, the Father will hear and forgive us, the Holy Spirit will cleanse us, and the glorified hosts will rejoice with us; for "joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance."

### Chapter IV.

#### FAITH.

"Nothing before, nothing behind:
The steps of faith
Fall on the seeming void, and find
The rock beneath."
—WHITTIER.

In the luminous words of an old writer: "Repentance is faith's usher, and dews all her way with tears. Repentance reads the law, and weeps; faith reads the Gospel, and comforts. Repentance looks on the rigorous brow of Moses; faith beholds the sweet countenance of Christ Jesus."

Faith in its general sense, and considered only as the work of the intellect, is "the conviction and persuasion that certain propositions are true." Christian faith is "a firm persuasion of the truth of Christian doctrines." But what is saving faith, as the second step in a genuine religious experience? Saving faith is much more than an intellectual belief in Christ and the Gospel; indeed, it is more a work of the heart than of the head. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." Philip said to the Eunuch, "If thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest be baptized."

In exercising saving faith I apprehend-or take

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hold of—the facts that I am a condemned sinner, and that Christ alone can save me. I assent to these propositions without reserve; and then I trust in God, fully relying upon his promises, and upon the blood of Christ for my salvation. This is partly the work of the intellect, but it is more a work of the affections; it is a loving, personal trust in the atonement, which not only enables me to believe and say that Christ died for all men, but prompts me to go a step further, where I rejoice in a knowledge of him as my personal, present Savior.

My logic is as simple and yet as strong as my love. I say: "My Heavenly Father promises, He that believeth shall be saved; I do believe, I affectionately trust his word: therefore I shall be saved, and in due time he will give me the satisfactory evidence." A lady of very deep religious experience was once requested by Mr. Wesley to give him a definition of faith, and she replied: "It is taking God at his word." The answer satisfied Mr. Wesley, and it will satisfy us; nothing could be more simple, nothing could be more exact. When Christ would illustrate saving faith to the Jewish ruler, he said: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." The poisoned, dying Hebrew, who believed the wonderful proclamation of the great lawgiver, had but to show his faith by turning his eyes toward the brazen serpent which was set up in the midst of the camp, and he

was instantly healed. So a repentant sinner, lying prostrate at the door of mercy, sick unto eternal death, acknowledging the justice of the condemnatory sentence which has been passed upon him, and yet crying for mercy, tired of sin, resolved to forsake sin, hearing that Jesus of Nazareth hangs on the cross for the express purpose that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life, has only to turn his anxious eyes toward the dear Redeemer, and to believe that, because Christ suffered, God now, in fulfillment of his promise, will save him. When he thus relies on God, that moment he is forgiven. Let him then harbor no anxieties about feeling or fitness, or times or seasons or evidences, but apply himself diligently and at once to the Master's work. This is his only business; God will take care of all the rest. His faith in Christ is accounted unto him for righteousness, and in God's good time he will find that,

> "The Spirit answers to the blood, And tells him he is born of God."

Such a reliance and expectation is justifying faith. Mr. Watson says of it: "It is an act of recumbency—we do rest upon Christ, as the stones in the building rest upon the corner-stone. Faith throws itself into Christ's arms; it saith, 'Christ is my priest, his blood is my sacrifice, his divine nature is my altar, and here I rest.'"

As to the particular way in which our Father will lead us, the same affectionate trust must characterize us, and we must always hold ourselves steadily to the

practical belief that God's promises will never fail. Of course we can not see the end from the beginning, we sometimes, perhaps, can not see one step in advance; then we must walk by faith, letting him lead us. Of course he does not explain all his purposes to us, but they are none the less wise or sure on that account. Our sole business is to trust him, and do his will. A very simple illustration may help us at this point. "One evening a father and his little daughter, who had been spending the afternoon at a neighbor's, started through the darkness for home. It was the first time she had ever been out of doors in the night, and she began to be troubled about the way home. 'I can't see our house, papa. I do n't know the way. Where are we going?' she said anxiously. He replied, 'I can see the road, and if you keep hold of my hand, I will take care of you.' Then she said, as if chiding and comforting herself, 'Yes, you do know the way, don't you, papa? You will take care of your little girl, 'cause you love her, do n't you, papa?' After this she only grasped his hand a little tighter, and trudged cheerfully onward wherever he led the way."

There is no antagonism between such simple faith, as the basis of spiritual life and a true philosophy. Faith is a higher faculty than reason, and its operations belong to a higher sphere. There is nothing truer than the well-known sentence with which Coleridge completes his literary biography: "The scheme of Christianity, though not discernible by human

reason, is yet in accordance with it, link follows link by necessary consequence; religion passes out of the ken of reason only when the eye of reason has reached its own horizon, and faith is then but its continuation. A simple, child-like faith is compatible with the largest knowledge, and the Christian consciousness is frequently the best solvent of doubt."

Faith accomplishes the work of salvation only by bringing to bear upon the sinner's heart the power of God; just as a mere child may move a whole train of cars by opening the valve and letting on the steam. The woman who passed through the throng which surrounded our Lord, and stooped down to touch the hem of his garment, was not healed by her touch, nor his garment, nor her marvelous faith, but by the power that St. Mark tells us had gone out of Christ. While we are not exactly saved by faith, it is through faith only that we receive the benefits of the merits of Jesus Christ. We are made spiritually whole by the virtue which the touch of faith draws out of Christ, One writer illustrates it as follows: "You have seen a chain in two pieces, and a link connecting them that looks like the letter S. Faith is that link: on one side it takes hold of the Savior, on the other it takes hold of the sinner."

Let me lay great stress upon the fact that a man can maintain his justified state before God, only by repeated and constant acts of faith; and for each special emergency that arises in his spiritual life he must exercise special faith. The faith of to-day will develop and strengthen you, and prepare you for greater things, but in no other sense will it meet the demands of to-morrow. "As thy days, so shall thy strength be;" we live by the day, and we must trust by the day. For this reason, Christian life is called in Scripture a "warfare," a "fight of faith," "a race," a "harvest field," a "voyage;" and faith in God is called a "shield," a "sword," a "girdle for the loins," an "anchor." Every burden that is borne, every victory that is gained, every successful prayer that is offered, is through faith. This proves the necessity of successive, persistent trust in God.

"Ne'er think the victory won,
Nor lay thine armor down;
The work of faith will not be done,
Till thou obtain the crown."

There are degrees of faith. Your faith, at conversion, may be perfect in kind, but it can not be perfect in degree. Young and inexperienced Christians can not and must not expect to be as strong in faith as those who are disciplined and developed by the strife and toil of years. And you must not murmur or despair because of the comparative weakness of your faith; for if you hold on to Christ, if you are obedient, if you maintain a life of progress, it will grow with your growth, and strengthen with your strength, until it shall enable you to remove mountains of difficulty, and, having done all, to stand when that great and notable day of the Lord shall come.

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt

be saved." It must be so; believe now, believe always, and thou wilt surely be saved.

"Sing, pray, and swerve not from his ways,
But do thine own part faithfully;
Trust his rich promises of grace,
So shall they be fulfilled in thee;
God never yet forsook at need
The soul that trusted him indeed."

Faith is the gift of God. The power to believe is bestowed upon us by God, in answer to prayer; but the exercise of that power belongs to us. "God never believes for a man, any more than he repents for him." If the penitent asks, grace will be bestowed, for God has so promised; let him then proceed at once to exercise it. Let it be brought to bear upon every promise of Scripture touching his case; and let this process be continued all through his religious life. Let the words "praying" and "believing" be an epitome of his spiritual history.

The power to believe is sometimes bestowed unasked, and its presence may precede the exercise of it by many years; and this only increases our responsibility. Does not the fact that we often find in the Word of God not only warnings but threatenings against those who do not believe, prove that men have the power to believe but do not use it?

God's mercy is nowhere shown more clearly than in the gift of this grace; and while we continue to ask and receive, with increasing wonder we must exclaim:

"O gift of gifts! O grace of faith!

My God, how can it be

FAITH. 31

That thou, who hast discerning love, Shouldst give that gift to me?"

If saving faith really exists in the heart, it will surely manifest itself in good works. By these we may test the faith, applying Christ's rule: "By their fruits ye may know them." There is no conflict between the two commands: "Believe and be saved," and "Work out your own salvation;" for once being saved through faith, we will inevitably go on working because we are saved. Faith is the life sap of the tree, genuine good works are the blossoms and the fruit; the latter can not possibly exist without the former. There is no value in works except as they prove the genuineness of our inward faith.

Dr. T. L. Cuyler, in illustrating the essential connection between faith and works, has used the following beautiful symbol:

"The second chapter of the Epistle by James seems, to my mind, to describe a spiritual wedding. We are bidden 'to a marriage;' and, as at the older marriage in Cana of Galilee, the holy Master is present, and consummates the nuptials. The parties to be united are but symbolic personages, and yet are real and life-like too. The bride is young and beautiful—ever young, and ever clothed upon with light as with a garment. Her face is clear as the day; her look is firm, and yet trustful. She is not of the earth but heaven-born, and wears her celestial parentage in every lineament of her radiant countenance. Her name is 'Faith.' She is the daughter of God. And

beside her stands one whose lusty form was made for deeds of daring and endurance. He is sinewy and athletic. There is valor in his eye, and 'cunning in his ten fingers,' and strength in his right arm. was created to act, to do, to suffer. He was formed for strife and struggle. His name is 'Action.' With solemn rites the two are joined in wedlock. both to love, and both to obey. They are always to live and move and suffer and conquer together. They are to be the faithful parents of every thing good on earth. On them, while united, Jehovah pronounces a blessing richer than that which gladdened the nuptials of Isaac and Rebekah, or of Jacob and Leah. While united, they are to live and grow and conquer; when separated, they are to droop and perish. For each other, and in each other, and with each other, their days of struggle and victory are to be passed, until time shall be no longer. And so 'Faith' and 'Works' were coupled by infinite Wisdom; and in the presence of the world it was solemnly announced, 'What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

### Chapter V.

#### CONVERSION.

"I lay my sins on Jesus,

The spotless Lamb of God;

He bears them all and frees us

From the accursed load.

I bring my guilt to Jesus,

To wash my crimson stains

White in his blood most precious,

Till not a stain remains." —BONAR.

USTIFICATION is a legal term, and transports us at once to the court-room. The judge is on the bench, and before him stands a criminal who has been found guilty of a great crime. Before judgment is pronounced and carried into execution, a friend of the culprit steps forward and pays down for him a certain amount, which, in strict accordance with the law, is considered a sufficient satisfaction for the offense. The judge accepts the indemnity, and releases the offender. He is still a guilty man, but the indemnity being accepted he has been pardoned, and can no more be legally prosecuted and punished for his offense than a person who has never broken the law. Law knows no justification for the offender. Here the Gospel differs from law. The law justifies only the blameless.

This is exactly my state as a sinner before God. I am guilty, and I confess my sinfulness. I can not make satisfaction, because I have no merit, no ability. My offense is so great that I am in danger of eternal destruction. Just now I turn my eyes toward Jesus, and with true penitence and implicit faith I remind him of his promise to save me. He is a faithful and almighty friend, and he at once steps forward, offering in my behalf, and as a sufficient atonement for my sins, his shed blood. Christ has infinite merit, and God accepts him as my substitute, my faith in him is accounted unto me for righteousness, and at once I am justified. I am not acquitted, for I am not innocent; I am not justified "by works," for I have not kept the whole law; I am simply justified "by faith" in Christ, who offers himself as my substitute, doing for me what I can not do for myself. I am pardoned.

"Justification, in its primary idea, is an act of God, as the chief magistrate, ordering the non-execution of penalty. The law says, Let the sinner die; God says, Let the sinner live. This is justification; it is making just, in the sense of treating the sinner, so far as penalty is concerned, the same as if he were just—the same as if he had not been guilty of transgression."\* If you ask me, When is a sinner justified? I answer, When he truly repents and truly believes, or accepts Christ as his Sayior.

<sup>\*</sup>Raymond's "Systematic Theology," Vol. II, p. 324.

#### REGENERATION.

Salvation includes not only the pardon of sin, but also a marked change in the moral character, which we call regeneration. Pardon is a work done for the sinner, releasing him from the liability to punishment for the sins of which he has repented; regeneration is a work done in the sinner by the Holy Spirit, changing his moral and religious motives, desires, purposes, and character. Justification is a change in our state, regeneration is a change in our nature; technically, the first precedes the second, but practically the two blessings are so closely connected that they may be regarded as contemporary.

The greatness of the change effected in conversion is very impressively expressed in Scripture. It is called passing from darkness to light; it is called a resurrection, a passing from death unto life; and our Lord himself, when explaining it to the Jewish ruler, declared it to be a new birth. There is nothing startling to us in such a declaration, for we are accustomed to mark great changes, not only in the circumstances, but in the characters, of men about us. How often, when we meet some friend of other days, are we impressed with a vague sense that he is not the man we once knew so intimately, after all; and a little more study and careful observation convince us that there is something lost, or something gained (or both), which sets the companion of to-day irrevocably over against the companion of yesterday. The change may have been wrought by a peculiar training, by health

either lost or found, by adversity, by affliction, by disappointment, by prosperity, or by the mere lapse of years, but every thing about him shows that he has little, if any thing, in common with the characteristics which once individualized him.

How it is, why it is, we may not be able to tell: nevertheless we are intensely conscious of the fact that our friend is changed; in all his aims and purposes he is another man. As our own years advance, and we compare the present with some period in the remote past, we are often conscious ourselves of an entire change of thoughts and feelings and habits, resulting in an entire change of character. Thorough and, in a worldly sense, all-embracing change, is common among men; while a man's life often turns upon a small point, and in an unexpected moment. Many men are converted almost instantly from one manner of thought and life to another—perhaps directly opposite. And when that conversion is effected by the Holy Spirit, and is commenced from religious motives, then it is Scriptural conversion—a conversion to a Christian life.

This change—called regeneration—is radical in its nature, comprehending a change of the whole man. There is no warrant in Scripture for regarding it as a mere amendment of the old life; an improvement upon good principles already implanted in the heart; a change of purpose; a mere growing better by care and duty and self-improvement. It is a change in kind; a change of principle; a grand renovation, spiritually,

of the man. Every traveler in England must have noticed there how kindly nature takes an old ruin to her heart. Covering it with greenest ivy, she strives to make it a part of herself. Gradually hiding its ugliness with her own mosses and trailing verdure, she makes the whole structure a thing of beauty. But it is a ruin still, and appropriately illustrates the piety of those who repudiate the idea of a radical change—a supernatural change—in conversion. The outward life, upon which men look, may be changed for the better, but the inner life, upon which God looks, is still deprayed and imperfect.

St. Paul makes it all clear to us in the following words: "If any man be in Christ [be regenerated] he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost."

The Fathers defined regeneration, salvation from the reigning power of sin. Naturally, we are morally corrupt. As the result of the first sin the entire race has inherited a depraved nature; all our faculties are affected by it, and the body, as well as the mind, suffers therefrom. As the result of this tendency we run readily into sin both of body and soul, and are condemned for our actual transgressions of the law of God. Our hearts are bad, and our affections reach out after unworthy objects; we are under the control of "a false love, a wrong love, a downward, selfish

love." The volitional faculty—the will—is also in bondage to sin, and we have no power to obey the dictates of conscience. In a word, we belong to the "kingdom of this world;" sin rules us, the will of Satan dominates ours.

Regeneration brings conscious freedom from this bondage. The weakness and imperfections of the mind and body are not entirely removed, and will not be in this life; we are not freed from errors in judgment or from the mistakes of ignorance; but the power of sin is broken, we are no longer controlled thereby.

The ruling love is changed. This involves more than a change of purpose; it is a change of character. We are now, through divine grace, under the control of a true, upward, Godward love. This is the normal condition of the human heart. We now love what we once hated, or were indifferent to, notwithstanding our better judgment convinced us of its value. We now hate what we once loved, although we knew it to be hurtful, or, at least, worthless. This true love determines and adjusts all our aims and purposes, turning them in a new and right direction.

The will is emancipated and strengthened. Conscience now speaks, and we not only desire to obey, and feel it right and best for us to obey, but we have the *power* to obey; we *do* obey, conscious all the while of supernatural aid. Through Christ strengthening us we can do all things; and so long as by faith we maintain this obedience, we are without condemnation. We now belong to the "kingdom of heaven," we love

God supremely; our desires harmonize with his law; his will dominates ours. Sin has separated between man and God; but regeneration reunites man to God, so that his thoughts, loves, tempers, purposes, and efforts, are towards God. He is "born of God;" his "life is hid with Christ, in God;" with free choice of love and will he serves God; he is saved, controlled, used, and exalted by God. A spiritual life is begun in him which will grow brighter and brighter to all eternity. And this he has received in the place of the old life of sin. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; but that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." If you ask me, When is a sinner regenerated? I answer, When he truly repents and truly believes.

# Chapter VI.

### CONVERSION-CONTINUED.

In his interview with Nicodemus, our Lord points out the agent accomplishing this great and important change in these words: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he can not enter into the kingdom of God." This language is a Hebraism, which presents the water as the symbol, and the Holy Spirit as the agent. As in the first creation, when man was made in the image of God, so in this recreation, whereby that lost image is restored, the Holy Spirit is the active agent. No man can be regenerated but by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Christ purchased pardon for all who seek him; Christ opened the fountain for sin and all uncleanness, and all who wash there shall be made pure. But we need much more than this; we need some one to help us into the fountain. In answer to the prayer of faith, God "puts his Spirit within us," and sinful as we are, strengthless as we are, he assists us in seeking, in finding, and in believing upon the Savior; the promise is thus fulfilled: "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Water baptism is a holy sacrament; it is the covenantal rite of the New Testament dispensation, and so it is the

door into the Church; it is the outward sign or profession of the inward work of grace; it is God's seal, and our seal, set to the covenant we have made with him: but water does not save and cleanse us, that is exclusively the work of the Holy Spirit. Just how the Spirit operates in this gracious work, God has not seen fit to explain to us; we probably are not capable of understanding it; but that the change is actually accomplished we may know and understand. When Christ said: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit," he intended especially to teach us that as the air proves its existence, not by being seen, but by its effects, so the Holy Spirit, whose substance is unseen, and whose operations are mysterious, can be known to us only by the results of these operations. Every one that is regenerated experiences the effect of the Spirit's power, but can not tell how or why or whence he acts. The man who was born blind could only answer the critical questions of the Pharisees by the simple assertion: "Whereas I was blind, now I see;" and the regenerated sinner can only bear testimony to the fact that his love and his will have been changed, he feels that he is a "new creature," and he is ready to give God the glory.

The change itself was instantaneous, but the consciousness of it may come to him so gradually that only by comparing his present state with his condition

some weeks or months ago can he feel certain that he is saved. Then he walked in darkness, now he walks in the light. On the other hand, the consciousness of the change may have been as instantaneous as the change itself, and he can tell the very hour and the very moment when he passed over Penuel and the sun rose upon him. He may have had much feeling or little feeling; great peace or ecstatic joy; these manifestations, dependent upon so many contingencies, argue nothing one way or another. The important thing is to know that now we are changed. Although we may not be as explicit as to time, it is necessary for us to be as clear in our testimony to the fact as was Summerfield, when a certain English bishop asked him, "Where were you born?" "I was born in Dublin and Liverpool," he answered. "How can that be? were you born in two places?" said the bishop. "Art thou a master in Israel and knowest not these things?" replied Summerfield.

### ADOPTION.

By adoption we commonly understand that a man takes the child of another, and places it in the condition of his own child; to be in every respect from thenceforth as his own, with all the rights and privileges and obligations and duties of a child. In conversion this is exactly what God does for us. Sin has brought us to the condition of aliens from God and his kingdom. We have rebelled against our rightful Sovereign; we, perhaps, have come to hate

that Sovereign, who is also our Father. In the fullest sense we have forfeited his love, and all claim upon his mercy. We are outcasts, prodigals, disinherited. All this is the inevitable result of sin. But now we repent of our sin; we believe in Christ; we are justified and regenerated; after which God changes our personal relations, and by a fatherly act he restores us to our lost heirship and rightful place in his family. We are now more than servants, doing his will as a task, by which we hope to avoid his displeasure; we are beloved children, actually delighting to do his will as it is made known to us. "When God pardons, he forgives; as a Sovereign, he justifies; as a Father, he adopts; and as a gracious and wonderworking God, he also regenerates. These are concomitant, contemporary. In the order of thought, justification is first, regeneration is second, and adoption third; all as if they were one—as in an obvious sense they are—are conditioned upon faith in the recipient."\* "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby ye cry, Abba, Father. As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. Ye are all children of God by faith in Jesus Christ." Young Christian, this is an inestimable blessing. Let it not be lightly regarded; may it be more than your meat and your drink practically to recognize the obligations it so delightfully imposes.

<sup>\*</sup> Raymond, Vol. II, page 361.

We are told that when the Danish missionaries stationed at Malabar set some of their converts to translate a catechism, in which it was asserted that believers become the sons of God, one of the translators was so startled that he suddenly laid down his pen, and exclaimed: "It is too much, let me rather render it, 'They shall be permitted to kiss his feet."

#### WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT.

"The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." In the words of Cawdray, "Like as fire is known not to be painted fire, but true fire, by heat and by the flame; so there are two witnesses of our adoption—God's Spirit and our spirit. Like as if a king or nobleman should, of mere love and favor, take in a beggar, nay a traitor, even so God did with us." It is but reasonable to expect that a man should receive a satisfactory assurance that so important a work as regeneration has actually been wrought in him. The Scriptures plainly teach that we may enjoy "a comfortable persuasion or conviction of present acceptance with God, and a cheerful hope of eternal life," and to this belief nearly all Christians of the present day firmly hold.

This assurance may vary in degree. One person may be very positive and clear that he is a child of God, having no doubts whatever upon that point; while another's assurance may be less distinct and yet amount to satisfactory persuasion; and still a third may, at times, be oppressed by doubts and fears.

The question is, May we have, and do we have, at any time, evidence which is perfectly satisfactory, that we are born of God and adopted into his family? Most certainly do we believe that one important work of the Holy Spirit is to produce in the mind of the believer in Christ a profound conviction of his acceptance with God, and that this he will do either directly, without the intervention of second causes, or through the various means of grace, such as prayer, the preaching of the Word, reading the Scriptures, or association with experienced Christians.

This assurance the young Christian should prayerfully seek, never resting satisfied until it is attained, and maintained. Such a clear, Scriptural experience will be, next to the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, the very best weapon with which to resist Satan, and fight the champions of antichrist, especially scoffers and infidels. John Wesley, in his peculiarly clear and impressive manner, defines the witness of the Spirit as: "An inward impression on your soul, whereby the Spirit of God immediately and directly witnesses to your spirit that you are a child of God; that Jesus hath loved you and given himself for you, that all your sins are blotted out, and you are reconciled to God."

In answer to the question, Does the Spirit testify to our adoption by an outward voice? Mr. Wesley replies: "No, nor always by an inward voice, although he may do this sometimes. Neither do I suppose that he always applies to the heart (though he often may), one or more texts of Scripture. But he so works upon the soul by his immediate influence, and by a strong, though inexplicable operation, that the stormy winds and troubled waves subside, and there is a sweet calm; the heart resting as in the arms of Jesus, and the sinner being clearly satisfied that God is reconciled, that all his iniquities are forgiven, and his sins are covered." To the witness of his Spirit, God has joined the witness of our own spirits; there is an inward experience (not always the same, or equally clear in every person, yet still unmistakable) from which we readily infer our acceptance with the Father. you lead a man out of a dark cave into the clear sunshine, he is fully conscious of the great change; so when a man passes from spiritual darkness to light, when the witnessing Spirit of adoption comes to join its testimony to that of his own soul, there can not possibly be any mistake about it; he does know that he is a child of God.

If you ask me, How this satisfactory conviction, or persuasion, comes into the heart; what is the mode of the Holy Spirit's operation? I answer, I can not tell. That is one of God's secrets. I only know that in every converted soul such a change is wrought, and such a testimony is given. The testimony of God's Spirit is primary, the testimony of your spirit is secondary and the "fruits of the Spirit," of which the apostle writes so beautifully, are confirmatory; they appear in the heart and life as the manifest results of conversion. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy,

peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts.

Man is not by nature good and joyful and peaceful. He does not have faith in God; he is not gentle and meek, and temperate; he does not, and can not, overcome the earthward affections and lusts of his evil nature; he does not and can not submit his selfish nature to the control of or to be in harmony with God's will. So when these fruits appear, there can be no reasonable doubt of their source or their existence. The heart from which they spring must be a supernaturally changed heart; the life which bears them must be a Christian life. If I enjoy this double testimony of God's Spirit and my own; if I bear this precious fruit; if I have come into righteousness and joy and peace in the Holy Ghost; if I am verily under the reign of God; if I am doing the will of God; then, beyond all question, I am "born again," I am in "the kingdom of God," I am converted. If I maintain my consecration of myself and all my powers to God's service; if I continue to be cheerfully obedient to the promptings of the Spirit; if I steadily grow in grace; if I constantly watch against sin, and the sly assaults of Satan; if I maintain a true Scriptural separateness from the world; if I constantly pray for and depend upon divine strength and wisdom; then will I constantly maintain this precious witness of the Spirit.

# Chapter VII.

### CONCERNING GROWTH.

"Heaven is not reached at a single bound;
But we build the ladder by which we rise
From the lowly earth to the vaulted skies,
And we mount to its summit round by round."
—HOLLAND.

You are to grow in grace, not into grace. The believing soul is "born of God" in a very short time, if not in a moment, and afterward grows up by degrees "into the measure of the full stature of Christ." All the graces of the Spirit are implanted at once in the regenerated soul; they are perfect in kind, and the process of growth at once begins; but when that soul is made "perfect in love," all hinderances to a rapid growth are removed, and a development is soon reached which is as beautiful as it is constant.

The life of a man who loves God "with all his heart" may be likened to a prepared garden, with all weeds and unfavorable influences removed; where the gardener assiduously trains the vines, fertilizes the soil about the plants, surrounds every thing with favorable circumstances, then watches until the blossoms appear and fruit is seen—much fruit—sweet, well-ripened, perfect fruit. In the beautiful language of

the Psalmist: "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing." To quote the well chosen words of Professor Upham: "We may not only affirm that there may be- a growth in perfection, but may assert, further, that the thing which is most perfect, if it be susceptible to growth at all, will have the most sure and rapid growth. Which will grow the more rapidly and symmetrically, the child which is perfect in its infancy, or one which is afflicted with some malformation? It is very clear that, although it is possible for a person who is partially holy to grow in holiness, a person who is entirely holy, although he may be assailed by unfavorable influences outwardly, will grow much more."

Growth is the only reliable preventive of back-sliding. If you would successfully resist those influences that tend to coldness, inefficiency, and apostasy, you must be a growing Christian. Then the very difficulties with which you meet will give a healthy tone and tendency to your powers, will invigorate the soul and develop resources. In the parable of the talents, Christ has special reference to our religious faculties. These, we are taught, may, by a careful use, be increased, not only fivefold and tenfold, but indefinitely. But if they are neglected—hid in a nap-kin—they not only will not increase, but will actually

be taken from us. By a slow and almost imperceptible process, they will waste entirely away. The servant who was pronounced wicked and slothful, did not throw away his lord's money, he simply hid it and made no effort to increase it. He intended to keep it, but by neglecting, he lost it.

So, young Christian, it may be your sincere purpose to keep the grace you now have, even while you neglect to improve upon it. But that amounts to nothing; already it is going from you, and soon you will be left empty-handed and condemned. To prevent this, and to fulfill the purposes of God in admitting you into his kingdom, and intrusting such precious talents to you, you must address yourself most prayerfully and persistently to this work of development. This must be the all-absorbing business of your life.

To meet the just expectation of the Church you must be a growing Christian. You have been admitted to the privileges of Church membership, and are being watched over and cared for, not only for your own sake, but for what you are expected to be and to do when you come to spiritual maturity.

When a babe comes into the house it commands the attention and service of all, because of its weakness and helplessness. The freshness and beauty of its young life compel the willing homage of all in the family. But when the babe has come to be a man in years, and in physical proportions, if he still demands and expects the same attention and service, he is laughed at and regarded as a failure. He has not met the just expectations of his friends. The family of Christ into which you have been born, does not expect you always to remain weak and inefficient—always to be nursed and favored. You are required to grow and become strong—able to bear burdens, and to guide the feeble footsteps of others in your turn. You are expected to become like the old pastor in Goldsmith's "Deserted Village," who

"Allur'd to brighter worlds, and led the way;" and you have no right to disappoint the family in these bright anticipations.

But you will not attain to this at a single bound. The beautiful order of nature is, first the twig and then the tree. This also is the beautiful order of grace. You must be content to grow. You have no right to expect now a maturity of Christian character and availability equal to those who have been years in the way. You are to "grow in the grace of which Christ is the author, and in the knowledge of which Christ is the object." Having attained unto this spiritual life, it is to be made perfect in you; all those qualities which make up your present character, and mark your new life as distinct from your old life, are to become more and more apparent. They are not only to be "in you," but they are to "abound." So you must daily attain unto a more perfect knowledge of Christ, not only by an increasing understanding of his word, but by a genuine, personal experience as well.

The truth is not only to be apprehended by you, but it is to enter into you, to be assimilated, to become a part of you, and by the unfolding of that truth in your life, you are to stand before the world in Christ's stead. You must be able to say: "I live, yet not I [no longer I]; Christ liveth in me." If Christ is in you, you are daily to become more like him. You are now a "worker together with Christ," and as you carry this Gospel to others, and strive to break down their indifference, their worldliness, or their unbelief, it is essential to your success that they recognize in you the same unconquerable zeal, the same abounding love, the same fervent hope, the same obedient faith, the same patient humility which distinguished the Master from the self-seeking crowd about him. And these qualities are to increase in you; they are to be the implements of your spiritual husbandry; they are to be the weapons of your warfare; they are to furnish you thoroughly unto all good works.

You must aim at a symmetrical growth. No one grace should be unduly cultivated to the neglect of another. Let the oarsman pull but one oar and his boat goes round and round, without making any actual headway; in like manner a one-sided Christian moves in a circle, and wastes his powers. For example, let a man cultivate the grace of zeal more than he cultivates knowledge, or prudence, or humility, and at once he becomes a fanatic, imperiling his own spiritual life, and the prosperity of the Church as

well. A crooked Christian, like a crooked tree, shows that there is something wrong in the process of growth. You must constantly keep Christ before you, as the true ideal character. Charles Dudley Warner has written some pretty thoughts about the poetic sensibility of a certain back-woodsman who acted as his guide in the Adirondacks. "He told of seeing once, or rather being in, a circular rainbow. He stood on Indian Head, overlooking the Lower Lake, so that he saw the whole bow in the sky and the lake, and seemed to be in the midst of it, 'only at one place there was an indentation in it where it rested on the lake, just enough to keep it from rolling off.' This 'resting' of the sphere seemed to give him great comfort." A well-rounded Christian character will grow to be like that rainbow; a beautiful, a perfect thing, springing from and resting on Christ.

If I were to offer you a gauge, by which to test your growth, it would be in these words of Christ: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." The development of this grace of cross-bearing, more than any other, marks the symmetrical growth of Christian character and knowledge. All those who have borne the cross can tell you that, although it was rude, and rugged and heavy, when they first bent to receive it, they can testify how rich and full it has made their lives; how blessed beyond all others are they upon whom it is laid. Rutherford has quaintly said: "He that looketh upon the white side of Christ's cross,

and taketh it up handsomely, findeth it just such a burden to him as wings are to a bird."

The Christian's business is to grow. Growth is promoted by constant faith, constant love, constant obedience, constant watchfulness, good food-such as comes from carefully studying and meditating upon the Scriptures—good air—found in the healthful associations of the various means of grace—and regular and abundant exercise of all our powers. Of some of these essentials to spiritual growth I shall speak more at length hereafter. Just here, however, let me say that a growing Christian must not be afraid of hard work. You should be suspicious of easy things. Learn to grapple cheerfully with hard things, for only through such discipline can you possibly attain your full stature as a matured Christian. A place among the picked soldiers of Frederick the Great was only granted to those who were of a certain required height; so among the choice followers of Prince Immanuel, there are no dwarfs, no weaklings. Look well to this matter, then. Take your spiritual measure daily. "Let the 'measure of the stature of the fullness' often be seen: but let the measure of the stature of littleness, dwarfishness, and emptiness be unknown."

### Chapter VIII.

### ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION.

"By faith in Christ I walk with God,
With heaven, my journey's end, in view;
Supported by his staff and rod,
My road is safe and pleasant too."—Newton.

↑ LTHOUGH a true scholar will never cease to - learn, and his intellectual powers will always be increasing, still there comes a time in his life when his mind is said to be mature. So in this process of spiritual growth there is a point, reached sooner or later, at which the Christian character may be said to be mature, or in one sense, perfect. To quote the author of "Credo:" "The Holy Ghost, if admitted into the soul, and if cherished there, begets a new and divine life, which is subsequently developed, and which manifests itself through the sensibilities, intellect, and will. The different conditions expressed by the terms 'justification,' 'conversion,' and 'sanctification,' begin at the same instant. But not until the old man gives way entirely to this new one, not until the person is really and throughout a new creature spiritually, does the work reach completeness. It is then called entire sanctification. Why need writers mystify so simple a subject?"

The Scriptures very frequently speak of this greater maturity or completeness, and exhort us to attain to it. "Leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith towards God." "Be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect," not absolute perfection, but Christian perfection. "Be perfect, by having a heart purified from all bate, and filled with all love. If thy vessel be filled with love, God can be no more than full. He is the perfect infinite, thou art the perfect finite. The shrine of a temple was the perfect image of the temple. The temple was a perfect temple, the shrine was a perfect shrine. They were different in magnitude, but they were alike perfect. Our Savior in this command distinctly affirms that perfectness in its evangelical sense consists in the indwelling reign of love in our hearts. It is a practical promise which is implied in the prayer of the apostle, and is expressly limited to this life, when he prays: 'The only God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.' And it is a practical precept which St. James gives: 'That ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.'

"Against these promises of the complete reign of love in the heart, completing our Christian life, it is useless to quote those imperfections and failings which belong to men as men, arising from the limitations of the human mind. Neither St. Paul nor St. James expected that the Christians they addressed would be perfect like angels, or even ideally perfect men, nor perfect performers of God's absolute law. But they did expect that the law of love might possess a perfect power in their hearts, and in that would consist the perfect character of their piety."\* The imperfections of the Christian's physical nature will not be entirely removed in this life. The same may be said of his intellectual nature. The unfavorable effects of these imperfections will always be seen in the best Christian's moral nature. These must, in all fairness, be set down as infirmities, for which we are not responsible; but, if entirely sanctified, actual sin, positive moral corruption, will not remain in us.

As an illustration, let us suppose that a man who is naturally quick-tempered and passionate, or, if you please, of a quarrelsome disposition, repents, believes, and is pardoned and regenerated. By constant watchfulness and dependence upon God he now has grace to control his passions, even under great provocation. When insulted or injured he still is conscious of a strong feeling of resentment; he must even confess to a strong desire, at times, to indulge his old propensities, and break out into an open quarrel. All this troubles him; but, by the help of God, does not conquer him. He remains outwardly master of the situation; but inwardly there is a great struggle. To

<sup>\*</sup>Dr. Whedon's Commentary on Matthew, v. 48.

have these propensities removed, to be no longer troubled and hindered by this inward struggle, to find it a natural and an easy thing to exercise perfect forgiveness, to realize a constant spirit of love, instead of resentment, towards all who injure him, to love God so perfectly, so supremely, that under all circumstances he shall love his neighbor as he loves himself,—this is the blessing he desires, this is the blessing God is ready to bestow upon him when he is ready to receive it.

Take another illustration. A converted man sometimes finds attendance upon the means of grace, prayer, thorough study of the Scriptures, public and private work for the Church, and especially the selfdenial necessary to keep himself unspotted from the world, irksome, and requiring a constant and sometimes painful effort on his part. By grace he succeeds in performing all these duties, and he is conscious of divine approval; but it is not easy, there is too much opposition from within. To have all this inward opposition removed, to have these various Christian duties a delight to the soul, to have no desires contrary to duty, to love God so supremely that he shall "serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind—" this is the blessing which the growing Christian longs for, and which God is willing to bestow upon him.

Again, the religious life of some who are undoubtedly converted is too often a succession of tumults and calms, trusting God one day and doubting

him the next, the clouds so quickly and invariably following the sunshine that there is no settled reliable experience. To rest in Christ, and never doubt him, to have constant peace, to be constantly growing, to maintain a constant assurance of acceptance with God,—this is the blessing promised us, and after which every young Christian should prayerfully struggle.

Mr. Wesley defines entire sanctification as "perfect love;" and as to whether this blessing is instantaneously or gradually bestowed, he says: "The separation of sin from the soul is constantly preceded and followed by a gradual work; but is that separation in itself instantaneous, or is it not? In examining this, let us go on step by step. An instantaneous change has been wrought in some believers; none can deny this. Since that change they enjoy perfect love. They feel this, and this alone. They 'rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in every thing give thanks.' Now this is all that I mean by perfection. Therefore these are witnesses of the perfection which I preach. But in some this change was not instantaneous. They did not perceive the instant when it was wrought. It is often difficult to perceive the instant when a man dies; yet there is an instant when life ceases. And if ever sin ceases, there must be a last moment of its existence, and a first moment of our deliverance from it."

Entire sanctification is not contemporary with regeneration, neither does it usually immediately follow regeneration, although sometimes it may. Usually

this grace of perfect love is attained after months or even years of spiritual growth; when, by maintaining its justified relation before God, the soul comes to desire greatly this blessing, to be intelligent in regard to its reception, to be perfectly willing to receive it, to put itself into a proper position or relation to receive it, to believe in it, and to believe for it. Perfection of love is the highest state of grace attainable in this life, although, so far as degrees are concerned, even such a love will be characterized by a rapid growth.

My purpose here is simply to direct the attention of young Christians to the attainableness of this high state of grace, and to impress upon their minds the fact that the precise time when it may be looked for and entered into depends altogether upon their diligence and the rapidity of their spiritual growth. I must refer my readers to such valuable works as Bishop Peck's "Central Idea of Christianity," and Bishop Foster's "Christian Purity; or, The Heritage of Faith," for a thorough discussion of the subject. Especially let me exhort them to go to the Scriptures, and in earnest prayer to God, for light and guidance in this important matter. The Scriptures most certainly recognize and urge us to the attainment of a state of grace, a state of spiritual maturity, which they call perfect love; a pure and supreme love towards God.

Young Christian, you have every reason to believe that this state of grace may be sought, obtained, and enjoyed *now*. Mark well the words of that eminent

servant of God, Bishop Simpson: "It is not necessary that we travel down into the valley to find the Pool of Siloam, and wait for the coming of the angel to trouble the waters, and for some strong man to lift us and put us in. No; the fountain is all around us, and flows divinely clear. The Son of God is waiting at this very moment to wash all our sins away. Have you a single stain upon your heart?—come to the fountain. Have you trouble and sorrow?—come at once, and receive joy and comfort."

Dear reader, seek this blessing, and seek it now. Having through grace attained unto it, all conflict between inclination and duty will cease in your life, all hinderances to your spiritual growth will be removed, the gift of power will be bestowed upon you, and God will certainly permit you to do a very great work for him and for his Church. I once heard Mr. Moody give an account of his own baptism from above for the wonderful work to which God has called him. It was the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and it came upon him while he was walking the streets—a characteristic way for the baptism of just such a man. The love of God was so poured into his heart, in answer to months of earnest prayer, that he had to cry, "Lord, stay thy hand!" Since that hour, he testified with tears, he had been "turned into another man." "O," he said, "how easy and how sweet it has been ever since then to work for Jesus!" It seemed as if he had been enabled to do more in the four years which immediately followed this blessing than in all his life before.

# Chapter IX.

### PRAYER.

"More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of,
Wherefore let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day;
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not those hands of prayer,
Both for themselves and those who call them friends?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."
—ALFRED TENNYSON.

TRUE prayer is just as indispensable to religious life as air is to physical life. A prayerless Christian is no Christian at all.

Prayer may be mental and vocal, the will and affections corresponding with the external act; or it may be purely mental; or it may be simply our desires going out after God without being clothed in words. In either case prayer is "the direct intercourse of the spirit of man with the spiritual and unseen Creator. God is a spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." As briefly and well-defined in the Westminster Catechism, "Prayer is the offering of our desires to God for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ,

with confession of our sins, and a thankful acknowledgment of his mercies." The Holy Scriptures, in addition to the general idea of prayer, which runs like a golden thread through every chapter, are rich in clear definitions and positive precepts touching the nature and duty of prayer.

True prayer, in any and every form, is God's ordained medium for the expression of our faith in him, and in his power to save. A faith which does not express itself in prayer is a dead faith. The Christian, especially, should cherish in his soul a controlling sense of God's absolute sovereignty both in the physical and the moral worlds, and of our utter dependence upon him. This is best done by cherishing the true spirit of prayer. Every manly man has a certain independence of character which, if not tempered by grace, will lead him to ignore God, to magnify and trust in the agency of secondary causes, to grow proud of his own wisdom, and build upon his own foundation. To correct this tendency, and to link this noble trait of character with his own attributes and thus perfect it, God has suspended his choicest blessings—those blessings which are the most necessary to us-upon the exercise of prayer; an act which has its root in faith, and blossoms out in the most cheerful and beautiful obedience to the Father's will.

In one sense nature answers back to Scripture, and not only makes the duty and obligation of prayer apparent from the very condition of our being, but actually makes the tendency to pray part of our moral constitution. A thoughtful man soon becomes painfully conscious of his helplessness in the world when he attempts to go beyond a certain limited sphere of knowledge and power. The more he knows the less he knows. He is ignorant of the future, ignorant of the very things he most desires to know touching the universe and God and his own being. A little experience brings him humbly to admit that he needs support, direction, wisdom from some source, from some being outside of and higher than himself. God is that being. How fitting it is that we gratefully acknowledge him as the Author of all good, and the Infinite Source of all our blessings! How suitable that we should acknowledge our sinfulness, and, in the name of Christ, plead for his pardon, and that he continue to us his temporal and spiritual favors!

Prayer, in one form or another, is natural to man. When men are at ease, and the current of life runs smoothly they may have but few thoughts of God, and no thought of praying to him. But when trouble comes, and human resources fail, and human helplessness becomes apparent, it is then they turn to and cry out after God, with an instinct as strong as that which impels the child to rush into its father's arms in the moment of danger. This instinct is not the result of education in a Christian land; for all men, everywhere, pray—the Christian to his God; the Persian to the sun, or fire; the Chinaman to his image of carved wood, or to the spirits of his departed ancestors; the Hindoo to his gods many and lords

many; the African to his fetich, or his idol of molded mud.

The influence of true prayer is not alone subjective, as some affirm; or valuable only for the effect which the suppliant produces on himself. In the first place, we can not conceive of a loving and merciful God as thus trifling with his creatures in the results of a duty which he has so constantly enjoined upon them; for no intelligent man can pray, or will attempt to pray, when he has no faith in the being to whom he prays, and only hopes to produce an empty emotion in himself. The thing is an absurdity; and is flatly contradicted in those commands of Scripture which prompt us to pray for temporal as well as spiritual blessings, and suspend so much that is necessary to us on the act of prayer—prayer which moves God.

God has plainly and repeatedly taught us in his Word that he will be inquired of in prayer, that there are innumerable blessings which he will bestow or withhold according as we pray or neglect to pray for them, and that he himself will be influenced, in his dealings with us, by true prayer. For proof of all this let the reader study carefully the Scriptural teachings in regard to this vital duty.

Sir Walter Raleigh one day asking a favor from Queen Elizabeth, the latter said to him, "Raleigh, when will you leave off begging?" To which he replied, "When your majesty leaves off giving." So let us ever be asking from God, who is ever giving, and ever willing to give.

True prayer is importunate. The "asking," "seeking," "knocking," spoken of in the seventh chapter of Matthew; Jacob wrestling all night with the angel, and crying, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me;" and especially the Syro-Phœnician woman, who would let no repulse, however humiliating, thwart her settled purpose to secure the Master's blessing for her child,—these, with thousands of less notable instances given in the sacred record, convince us that prayer is no faint desire of the soul, which comes and goes like the smile on the face of a thoughtless child, but is a settled purpose of a man's whole being, and involves all the earnestness and energy of his nature. In the words of Coleridge to his nephew: "Believe me, to pray with all your heart and strength, with the reason and will, to believe vividly that God will listen to your voice through Christ, and verily do the thing that pleaseth him at last—this is the last, the greatest achievement of the Christian's warfare on earth." Teach us to pray, Lord!

This kind of persistence in prayer involves a faith which reveals itself in implicit obedience to God, and a positive expectation that he will answer, in his own good time and way; a faith which itself evidences a complete consecration of life to God, and a complete submission to his will; a faith which knows that God will always do what is best for us, and, leaving the matter entirely in his hands, is just as ready to be thankful for a refusal as for an answer to prayer.

St. Paul besought God thrice that he would re-

move a great trouble, which he likened unto a thorn in the flesh. This petition he offered in the spirit above defined; and, at last, God answered, not by actually removing the trouble, but just as effectually, by giving him grace and strength cheerfully to bear it. This teaches us that God's promise to answer prayer is always qualified by his knowledge of what is best for us; and that therefore he will sometimes answer in a manner which we did not expect, but which is much more effective for our relief. Hence, every prayer should be characterized by the spirit which finds expression in the words: "Father, thy will, not mine, be done!"

"Good prayers," says Leighton, "never come weeping home. I am sure I will receive what I ask, or what I should ask."

The command to "pray without ceasing," enjoins upon us the cultivation of a constant spirit of prayer, that our hearts may always be in a receptive state, and that our lives may always be subject to divine control and guidance.

I desire especially to impress upon young Christians the importance of secret prayer. This is to be the great antagonistic force against the pressure of evil which surrounds us continually; it should therefore be habitual and frequent. It is absolutely essential to our spiritual health that we regularly enter our closets, shut to the door, read and meditate upon God's Word, calmly look within, and see how matters stand between our souls and Christ, and what are our

most urgent wants; then pour out our souls to God in earnest prayer. Take plenty of time each day for this exercise, my young friend! Otherwise you will not grow, and quite likely you will soon fall. Your zeal in Church work may be great, but, unless you are much in secret prayer, it will be a zeal not according to knowledge; you will be spiritually weak, and sooner or later will bring reproach upon the cause you are now seeking to advance. The Church may rapidly promote you, and place great responsibilities upon you, but you will certainly disappoint all her expectations, unless you learn to love and draw constant strength and wisdom from secret prayer; and, in the end, you will certainly have to take up the words of Solomon and confess: "They made me a keeper of vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept." It is better for your business interests to suffer, if need be, than to dwarf and starve your soul's life by neglecting this duty. But this will seldom, if ever, be necessary; for by making this an indispensable part of your daily occupation, you can easily arrange for it, so that it will come in its regular order. If you do this, it will not be long before you will be constantly looking forward to the hour set apart for uninterrupted communion with God, as the brightest, the most enjoyable, and the most profitable of all the day.

Young Christian, you can't live without regular secret prayer; with it you can live, and grow, and reach and maintain a blessed spiritual maturity.

Show me a Christian who neglects this duty, and you will have shown me one who knows but little of the life and power of godliness. We are told, in ancient history, that it was thought by the people that Numa Pompilius—the second and the wisest king of Rome—was accustomed to retire to the forest, and receive wisdom and instruction from the goddess Egeria—who met him in secret—and then came forth to triumph in the government, and over his enemies. So the Christian, in careful, thoughtful, secret prayer, receives from the Holy Spirit strength equal to his day, and wisdom to meet all his public responsibilities, and to circumvent all his spiritual foes.

All strong Christians give much time to secret prayer. Dr. Payson writes: "Since I began, when a student, to ask God's blessing on my studies, I have done more in one week than in one year before." Luther, when most pressed with his gigantic toils, said to a friend: "I have so much to do that I can not get on without three hours a day of prayer." General Havelock arose at four in the morning—if the hour for marching was six—rather than lose the precious privilege of communion with God before setting out. Sir Matthew Hale said: "If I omit praying and reading God's Word in the morning, nothing goes well all day."

The duties of family and public prayer will constantly be brought before you by the Scriptures and the Church, as your spiritual life begins to broaden and put on strength; and if you learn to love secret

prayer, these duties will be pleasant rather than distasteful to you, and the regular practice of prayer at all appropriate times will cause those graces which go to make up a well-rounded, reliable, useful Christian character not only to be in you but to abound.

"Lord, I have shut my door,
Shut out life's busy cares and fretting noise:
Here in this silence they intrude no more.
Speak thou, and heavenly joys
Shall fill my heart with music sweet and calm—
A holy psalm."

It is objected to prayer, (1) That as God is infinitely wise and good, his wisdom and justice will lead him to bestow whatever is fit and best for us without praying. (2) That the answer to prayer would be a violation of natural law, since by that law every thing comes to us in a certain chain of cause and effect which our praying can not disturb or render more favorable to us. These are the two most important objections to a belief in the efficacy of prayer. It does not come within the plan of these brief chapters to argue much against objections, but it seems to me that this entire question about the possibility or propriety of answers to prayers, naturally narrows itself down into one as to the existence of God. To those who deny the existence of a supreme, creative intelligence, and an infallible revelation of his will, I have here nothing to say; to those who admit the existence of God and his revealed Word, it is sufficient for me to say that since our Father must have complete control over his

own works, and the laws which regulate them, and since he has commanded us to pray, and promised to answer our prayers, it is the most reasonable of all acts for us to obey his command and expect the fulfillment of his pledges, confidently believing that he will do no violence to his laws by granting that in answer to our prayer which he would withhold were we prayerless. In the words of a clear writer upon this subject: "Laws, rightly understood, are the servants of God, and not his masters; the channels through which he has chosen ordinarily to communicate material blessings to his creatures, and not the chains which bind him from coming to their assistance. Even the will and intelligence of man himself can, within certain limits, employ the laws of nature in granting the requests which his friend may make; and if that be so, is there any absurdity in supposing that the will of the highest intelligence, to whom all things are subservient, may not employ these laws, in answering his people's prayers?"

# Chapter X.

### STUDY OF THE BIBLE.

"Art builds on sand; the works of pride
And human passion change and fall;
But that which shares the life of God
With him surviveth all."
—WHITTIER.

THEN Eadwine, one of the early English kings, contemplated becoming a Christian, he sought the counsel of his oldest and chief men, who gathered to deliberate on the new faith which they were exhorted to embrace in place of the pagan worship of Woden and Thunder, "To finer minds the charm of Christianity lay then, as now, in the light it threw on the darkness which encompassed men's lives—the darkness of the future as of the past. 'So seems the life of man, O king,' burst forth an aged Ealdarman, 'as a sparrow's flight through the hall when a man is sitting at meat in Winter-tide, with the warm fire lighted on the hearth, but the chill rain storm without. The sparrow flies in at one door, and tarries for a moment in the light and heat of the hearth-fire, and then flying forth from the other vanishes into the wintry darkness whence it came. So tarries for a moment the life of man in our sight; but what is before it, what after it, we know not. If this new

teaching tell us aught certainly of these, let us follow it." The natural longings of the human soul for religious knowledge are met in the Bible; and this "new teaching" has never failed to satisfy all hearts that have received it. The Bible is a book of certainties, throwing full light upon all those points which have most closely engaged the attention of thoughtful men. When rightly understood it is to be received as the infallible Word of God. It is to us the only authoritative revelation of the will of God. From it alone come to men correct ideas of the one self-existent God, our Creator; of the origin and immortality of the human soul; the nature of sin, and the remedy for sin; the true object of life; the joys of heaven and the miseries of hell; the love of God for his creatures, his will concerning them, and his fatherly care over them. Of course, then, the Bible should be constantly read and studied by the Christian that he may be to the fullest possible extent intelligent in his spiritual life. Careful study of the Word of God is just as indispensable to religious life as food is to physical life. All growing Christians are huge and hungry feeders on the Bible; indeed, the Word prayerfully studied should be the chief mental diet of a healthy believer. Those who do not cultivate this kind of devotion to the Word speedily dwindle into spiritual dwarfs.

The Bible is its own best defender. Infidelity will

<sup>\*</sup> Green's "History of the English People," Volume I, page 46.

be contemned, and Christianity exalted in proportion to men's real knowledge of Scripture. The great work of the Church is not to apologize for the Bible, but to proclaim it—to persuade men to study it. If unconverted men can be led to apprehend the truth, there will be no trouble about their believing it. Give it free course in the world; let men fairly try it, and prove it by careful study; and the Bible will need no bolstering up, but in its own inherent, divine strength will go forth to conquer all hearts.

The Bible has a peculiar interest for the converted soul. Mr. Monod illustrates that fact as follows: "A young lady once received a book of much interest. After she had read it she was satisfied, and put it aside on the shelf. The author of that book was introduced into her father's house, proved to be a man of noble position, and finally offered her marriage, which she accepted. Then she took down the book from the shelf, and every page had a fresher and deeper interest for her. Thus, espoused to Christ Jesus, we find the Bible yet the most precious of books." There is a hidden meaning, a subtile sweetness, of which before we had no knowledge, and to which the most cultivated irreligious minds are strangers. A genuine love for the Bible, a love which perhaps is somewhat faint at first, but which will grow stronger by cultivation, is one of the proofs we have that our hearts are changed, and we are renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Supreme Intelligence, who inspired the Word, shines into our hearts

and minds, and in an especial manner helps us to comprehend and feast upon his truth.

A young Christian should not be content with merely reading the Bible, either by course or in detached portions, but should cultivate the habit of studying, of searching the Scriptures in a thoughtful, prayerful manner. The most precious of metals is not found by the casual passer-by, and like stones or quartz picked up by the wayside. Only those who are skilled in examining and sifting the sands from the bed of the rapid river, or in slowly sinking the deep shaft, and tracing the ore-veins hundreds of feet beneath the surface, find out the cunning hiding-places of the treasure and bring it to light as the reward of their industry. So the Bible is the deepest of all mines, and the purest gold of the Gospel is only found by those who give their best powers to the work of searching for it. The careless reader is always complaining of confusion and want of harmony in Scripture. To such a one the following words are remarkably well adapted: "The Bible contains a complete system of theology, a complete system of ethics; but it is as the heavens contain a system of astronomy, or as the earth contains a system of geology; and the eye of the listless reader may wander over it for years and not discover that God has placed in his Word a perfect organization of theology and of ethics: but the earnest student of the Bible sees it and rejoices in it. It is with careless readers of Scripture as it was with mankind who trod the earth for

nearly six thousand years, and never dreamed its surface was a regular structure, with its strata arranged in systematic order, and each stratum presenting a beautiful lesson and unfolding its grand history."

But now as the result of sanctified study, that lesson and that history, harmonizing with the lesson and history of the Bible, call upon all men to reverence, to love, and to obey the God both of nature and revelation. The men who have been, and are now the most learned, and who by their life-long study of the Bible are the most competent to pass judgment upon it, have been the firmest believers in its truths. Coleridge, in one of the remarkable letters which he wrote upon the inspiration of the Bible, says: "In the Bible there is more that finds me than I have experienced in all other books put together. The words of the Bible find me at greater depths of my being; and whatever finds me brings with it an irresistible evidence of having proceeded from the Holy Spirit." We must lay great stress upon the words of that profound logician, Bishop Butler: "To all who take up the oracles of God with integrity and honesty, the Bible will ever possess the peculiarity of meeting every want and appeasing every difficulty. In its pages every longing of our nature (the most superficial and the most profound) will find satisfaction."

In his dying hour, the great statesman, Wilberforce, said to a friend: "Study the Bible; let no religious book take its place. Through all my perplexities and distresses I never read any other book,

and I never knew the want of any other. It has been my hourly study; and all my knowledge of the doctrines, and all my acquaintance with the experience and realities, of religion have been derived from the Bible only." Daniel Webster, when commended on a certain occasion for his eloquence, replied: "If any thing I have ever said or written deserves the feeblest encomium of my fellow-countrymen, I have no hesitation in declaring that for their partiality I am indebted, solely indebted, to the daily and attentive perusal of the Holy Scriptures, the source of all true poetry and eloquence, as well as all good and all comfort," and all who are familiar with the great senator's grandly simple style will have no hesitancy in accepting his statement.

"Thy creatures," said Lord Bacon, "have been my books, but thy Scriptures much more. I have sought thee in courts, fields, and gardens, but I have found thee in thy temples." Said Sir Isaac Newton: "We account the Scriptures of God to be the most sublime philosophy." Thomas, Lord Erskine, wrote: "My firm belief in the holy Gospel is by no means owing to the prejudices of education, but it arises from the most continued reflections of my riper years and understanding." Testimonies similar to these could be produced almost indefinitely from the very first thinkers of our own and other times.

You should cultivate the habit of studying the Bible daily, accompanying the exercise with earnest prayer for divine guidance. Few men get suddenly

rich. Most private fortunes are made by the slow accumulations of years of industry and close attention to business. So with the riches of Scriptural wisdom. It is by no sudden effort of the intellect, but by oftrepeated research and thought that the mind becomes master of them. There are depths there which no brief, spasmodic effort can fathom; and, although every thing essential to salvation is there made very plain, still there are hidden gems that even the wisest and strongest can secure only by years of daily search.

In the study of the Scriptures, we should read just as much each day as we can digest—just as much as we can think over and understand. You may overread. "Some persons who want to be vigorous and strong say, 'To eat is the way to become so,' and they gorge their stomachs with food and overtax their powers, and make themselves weak and stupid by excessive eating. And you may eat too much Bible as well as too much bread."

If you are pressed for time, then spend the precious moments on a portion of a chapter. When even a single verse especially impresses you, let it be the subject for meditation during the entire day; in this manner you are to wait for the blessing to come from the Divine Word. Hastily skimming over a chapter or two each day, as a mere matter of duty or principle, is never beneficial; it is really a waste of time, and an impertinence before God. It is far better to take a fragrant and nutritious bit, a verse or a word perhaps, and let it lie in the mind, and fill the soul

with its sweetness for a day or a week or a month at a time.

It is well to make a reasonable use of commentaries and other helps to a proper understanding of the Word; but you should not lay too much stress upon these. "An unlettered man, having received as a present from a friend a copy of Shakespeare, with notes, was subsequently asked how he liked the book. He said that he could understand the reading very well, and he hoped that after a while he should be able to understand the notes!" Plain minds can usually understand the plain Word best without such a profusion of comment and exposition. Compare Scripture with Scripture. Look out all the references. Find out all that the Bible says upon a particular subject. Be a close student of the Word itself, after which, if you deem it necessary, find out what scholars say about it. There is a marvelous power for mind and heart illumination in the simple text of Scripture when thoroughly prayed over and meditated upon. Of the power of the Bible alone to lead men to the Savior, a successful missionary leaves remarkable testimony. His attention was called, in examining converts from paganism, to the oft-repeated mention of the New Testament as the only means used by the Spirit to lead them to Christ. Noting such cases afterward, he found that "more than two-thirds of the two hundred catechists, lay preachers, and schoolmasters had been aroused to a sense of their danger while living in sin, and had afterwards obtained

peace solely through reading their Testaments, without having received any counsel, admonition, or spiritual instruction from any one."

Constantly study the Bible for the purpose of qualifying yourself to instruct others, and to intelligently bear your part in the religious services of the Church; but particularly let me remind you of the importance of reading and studying the Word for the nourishment of your own soul. Do n't starve your own life in your zeal to provide food for others. Prayerfully search the Scriptures; search them daily. This is the only way to become strong, to grow, to attain maturity, to bear much fruit, to keep the mind from religious error, to successfully combat infidelity, to cultivate a love which shall be as broad as the world and as high as heaven.

## Chapter XI.

#### SOCIAL LIFE AND AMUSEMENTS.

ISTORY records that "in the days of Tiberius, it was thought a crime to carry a ring stamped with the image of Augustus into any mean or sordid place where it might be polluted." With the same exalted sense of the majesty and purity of the Master whom we serve, let us be careful how we carry his "image and superscription" into any associations unworthy of him, or where we shall be in danger of bringing a reproach upon his name.

One of the very first questions which a young Christian will ask is: How am I to decide between the seemingly conflicting claims of social life and the Church; especially as to the matter of popular amusements? No direct statements are made in Scripture in regard to many recreations and amusements which some strongly condemn and others as strongly sanction. There is here a conflict of opinion between different denominations, and even between different members of the same communion. Some stoutly contend for "liberal" and "advanced" notions as to our associations with the world, while others as earnestly insist upon "old-fashioned" and "Scriptural" practices. How, therefore, are we to know just exactly

what course to pursue? Indiscriminate and indefinite condemnation of popular recreations does not help us. Young people must have amusements as well as solid occupation; and we need explicit instruction as to what associations are right and what are wrong; we need clearly to understand the principles upon which our decisions ought to be made.

I think I can best answer these natural and important inquiries by referring my young friends to certain general principles which have their root in Scripture, and which apply to the daily conduct of all true Christians.

The first may be stated in the words of St. Paul: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." A Christian is a pledged follower of Christ, a laborer together with Christ; such obligations and relations are altogether too high and holy to be, even for a moment, trifled with.

The fair name of the Church is, to a certain extent, in every Christian's keeping; his life will be the standard by which many will insist upon judging the Church; and the only rule by which he may safely test the correctness of any practice is the revealed will of God. When God speaks, it is "second nature" for the honest, consecrated Christian to cheerfully obey. Human standards of opinion and practice are constantly changing. God's standard is ever the same; and strict conformity to it will enable one to be

in the world, and at the same time, not to be of the world; to come in contact with social life, at every necessary point, and yet maintain one's integrity.

A Christian is to be united to the world, and yet to be separate from it; united in the sense that Christ was when he ate with publicans and sinners, when he attended the marriage feast, when he stood by the grave of his friend, when he conversed with and instructed the learned Pharisees, and when he took little children in his arms to bless them; always in full sympathy with the hopes and fears, the joys and sorrows of humanity; always understanding the real necessities of men; always anxious to lift them heavenward; always loving them, and always showing that love by self-sacrificing efforts to inspire their confidence and to do them good. He is separate in the sense that Christ was when he maintained his integrity under the fierce temptations of Satan, and the plausible demands of the high and learned men of the nation; when he boldly denounced the sins of the people, reproved those who desecrated the temple, or severely rebuked the proud formalists and hypocrites, who brought reproach upon the name of religion; or when he stood firm amid the storms of persecution, calmly refused to compromise in the least his principles, and freely laid down his life to prove his absolute devotion to the truth. Christ was no hermit—he was no aristocrat. No one ever got nearer to the hearts of common men than he; and yet no man-whether Pharisee or sinner, whether learned doctor or igno-

rant fisherman—ever approached Christ without feeling that there was something about him better than the world, and that completely distinguished him from the world. This made poor, burdened men confide in him; this made captive souls hope in him. Now, in this, as in all things, Christ is our model. He walked among men with a love and devotion to humanity that won nearly all hearts, and yet he maintained a oneness with the Father which exalted him above the world-which kept him pure. This was the secret of his power, this is the secret of every good man's power. So Christ most earnestly petitioned the Father, for his disciples: "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I sent them into the world. Sanctify them"—that is, set them apart to be holy, to be unlike a wicked world, to be a peculiar people—"sanctify them through thy truth."

There is no greater mistake than for a young Christian to imagine that he is not to be unlike the world. It is no part of our business as Christians, by compromising, and temporizing, to break down the distinctions—the Scriptural distinctions—between the spirit of the world and the disciples of Jesus; even if by so doing we think we may win some souls. According to an ancient fable, the moon in an eclipse complained to the sun, saying: "Why, my dearest friend, dost thou not shine upon me, as usual?" "Do

I not?" said the sun. "I am sure I am shining as I always do; why do you not enjoy my light as usual?" "O, I see," said the moon, "the earth has got between us." Young Christian, the Sun of righteousness always shines; and it is your business to be so thoroughly united to the true Church, to be so uncompromisingly identified with the truth, to stand out so completely from the world that the light may constantly fall on you, warming you into life and growth and fruitfulness.

The plain command of the apostle furnishes a test that may be used as a touchstone in all doubtful cases which arise in our social relations and enjoyments. The simple question is, Can this be done in the name of the Lord Jesus? When you come up to the door of any place of amusement, towards which your footsteps may have tended—especially a place which is usually frequented by irreligious persons when you are about to engage in any occupation or recreation that is in the slightest degree doubtful, be sure prayerfully to ask this question: Would Christ approve of this! Can I ask his presence and blessing as I enter here? "Rev. George Whitefield was at one time solicited by a professed Christian lady to play a game of cards, and then go to the theater, where a celebrated actor was to perform, and where many coldhearted, careless professors of religion would be found. When first asked, he made no objection, and when the cards were produced, and they were seated at the table, he said: 'Let us ask the blessing of God.' 'Ask the blessing of God at a game of cards?' exclaimed the astonished lady; 'I never heard of such a thing.' Mr. Whitefield replied: 'Ought we to engage in any thing on which we can not ask his blessing, and at which we can not ask his presence?' This ended the game; and it need not be added that the lady failed to urge his attendance upon the theater."

Amusements are not the business of life. They are not to be regarded as necessities, but as luxuries; there is, therefore, great fitness in the following words: "Let amusements fill up the chinks in your existence, not the great spaces thereof. Let your pleasures be taken as Daniel took his prayers—with his window open; pleasures which need not cause a single blush on an ingenuous cheek." If the devil ever laughs in his sleeve, it is when he has persuaded a professed Christian to compromise in a doubtful matter; for he knows that a little yielding from the strict line of right and duty will, if continued, end in coldness, carelessness, indifference, and finally complete apostasy. Compromising Christians are Satan's faithful allies; his decoys, by which he entices crowds of weak-minded ones into his net; while, on the other hand, uncompromising Christians are the pillars of the Church, and the chosen instruments whereby God will convert this world to his truth. There is no point where Satan is trying more skillfully—or with more subtile plausibility—to rub out the Scriptural line of separation between the Church and the world

than at this point of popular amusements. For that reason, if for no other, an honest Christian can not afford to stand in any doubtful position before the world. Our wisest course is to be out and out on Christ's side, or else make no pretensions whatever. In this fight an open enemy is less dangerous than a doubtful friend.

The second general principle is also clearly stated by St. Paul: "Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend." The strict application of this rule will necessitate the disuse of any thing, even in itself innocent, by which we are in danger of exerting a hurtful influence over those who are weak, and, even unintentionally, leading them astray. There are some amusements in which you, my young reader, may perhaps safely engage, and there are some places of entertainment where you, perhaps, may safely enter, but which are not safe for others, who, encouraged by your example, may be drawn into them to their soul's hurt. There are also those connected with you in the Church—call them weak and bigoted, if you please—who regard some amusements and entertainments as wrong, which you regard as harmless, and who would be grieved and lose confidence in you if you indulged in them; and perhaps over your indulgence they would stumble and fall.

You are bound by your Church vows to do nothing that will discourage, but every thing that will

encourage, such weak ones, or such as honestly differ with you. So, while you are not to yield to bigotry or captiousness, yet for the sake of these weak ones, for the sake of these conscientious ones, for Christ's sake, who wants them helped and saved, you will forego these amusements—which are of but little, if any, importance—and you will avoid the very appearance of evil. If you can not do this, even if it cost you a little sacrifice, you will do well to look to your evidences, and at once secure a deeper work of grace in your heart.

This second rule will, if its real spirit is observed, shut us off from all associations or amusements which have, in the least, an injurious effect upon our religious life. Conscience must be permitted to speak here. Frequent and prayerful self-examination must make us intelligent upon this point. Whatever gets between us and God, even in the slightest degree, must be firmly put away. Whatever interferes with prayer or faith, or love or successful effort, even slightly, must be resolutely excluded from our lives, though the process of pruning be painful.

The testimony of the Bible will harmonize at this point with the past and present experience of all mature Christians; and it will not be safe for you, my young friend, to attempt any experiments in which you hope to make your religious life an exception in the Church. If, in returning from any place of amusement, or from any social circle, you find that the usual reading of God's Word and prayer are in

any way distasteful to you because of your recent associations, then the sooner you positively decide the matter, and uncompromisingly choose Christ and the joy of the Lord rather than the transient pleasures of the world, the better for your spiritual life. You must not hesitate here. It must be either God or mammon; it can not possibly be both.

These rules will also exclude the excessive use of even innocent amusements. A reasonable portion of a young Christian's time may be spent in the enjoyment of these; but when they absorb so much time and attention that important duties are thereby neglected, then they become real hinderances to his spiritual development, and must be promptly brought within reasonable limits, or abandoned altogether. Some amusements are really necessary as healthful recreations; beyond this, however, they must not be permitted to engage our attention and our time, lest they unfit us for the grave responsibilities which rest upon us as laborers together with Christ and his Church. Without doubt, this question of social life and amusements is a puzzling one for those Christians who aim at living just as near to the world as is possible without abandoning altogether Christ and the Church; but it is in no sense troublesome to those who are settled and fixed in their determination to be unmistakably on the Lord's side. The safest way, the best way, is to keep just as far as possible from the danger-line which Christ has drawn between his kingdom and the kingdom of the world. "There is a story of a

gentleman who, wishing to employ a coachman, had the candidates before him, and examined them together as to their ability to drive his carriage upon the verge of a precipice. One could drive safely within a foot of the edge; another within a few inches, and still another declared that he could drive with the tire projecting over the edge half its width. The last one, when asked, replied that for his part, he should keep as far off as possible, and he it was that won the coveted position." A word to the wise is sufficient—avoid the very appearance of evil.

## Chapter XII.

#### TEMPTATION.

"Like a cradle rocking, rocking, Silent, peaceful, to and fro, Like a mother's sweet looks dropping On the little face below. Hangs the green earth, swinging, turning, Jarless, noiseless, safe and slow, Falls the light of God's face bending Down and watching us below: And as feeble babes that suffer, Toss, and crv, and will not rest, Are the ones the tender mother Holds the closest, loves the best, So when we are weak and wretched, By our sins weighed down, distressed, Then it is that God's great patience Holds us closest, loves us best!"

-SAXE-HOLM.

THE word "temptation" really denotes that which entices or puts one to the test. In common language it signifies a solicitation or enticement to sin. God may, for wise purposes, suffer us to be tempted—not to solicit us to sin, but to subject us to trial. He does this sometimes for the testing of our faith; and sometimes for our discipline, that the various Christian graces may thrive more vigorously in our hearts. Especially does he thus try, carefully and watchfully,

those upon whom he looks with most favor; those whom he seeks to set apart for some great work. St. Paul was arrested in the very midst of his glorious career as preacher to the Gentiles, and confined for two years in the Roman fortress at Cæsarea. years taken out of the best part of such a life—two years of complete isolation from the world, amid the depressing influences of a prison—it seems a very strange dispensation of providence that such a trial should be permitted to come upon such a man, and especially at such a time. But God knows best what his trusting followers need; and no careful student of the life of St. Paul can fail to note that after that two years of calm meditation, and uninterrupted prayer, and patient submission to the Master's will, the apostle evidenced a deeper experience, a more thorough knowledge of and confidence in the Gospel, and a more marked fitness for this peculiar work than ever before. Any careful reader of the immortal "Pilgrim's Progress" must, I think, admit that had not John Bunyan been arrested and taken away from his peculiarly active and zealous life as an itinerant preacher, and subjected to the peculiar development and influences of the years spent as a prisoner in Bedford Jail, the world would never have been blessed with that wonderful book which, next to the Bible, has been the most valuable of all books as a means of comfort and instruction to God's people.

The Word of God and the history of the Church, unite in testimony to this fact, that if we aspire to great excellence, either in our character or our work, we must, with firm faith and ready submission, accept God's plan. The great spiritual foe of our race is Satan—the enemy of all righteousness; with him we are constantly compelled to measure strength. He is a crafty antagonist. Every Christian has felt his power, and once he even dared to meet, in open encounter, the Prince of Peace himself. Christ conquered him; and that victory is our assurance that, "through Christ strengthening us," we also may prevail—always prevail—against the fiend. Satan has many allies: evil spirits, wicked men, the weakness of the flesh, superstition, bigotry and the thousand and one circumstances and events in life which he so adroitly turns to his own dark account. He assumes such varied forms. Now, he "goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour;" and again, he is "transformed into an angel of light," and destroys by the very purity of his seeming. With a far-reaching skill he plans and executes his attacks. He knows every man's weak side, and he never fails to concentrate against it all the force which God will permit. "As Philip of Macedon was riding into battle, at the head of his troops, entirely encased in armor, an arrow from an enemy's bow struck him in the eye. As he pulled it out, the attendants saw inscribed on the shaft, these words: 'For Philip's Eve."

So, if there is an open point in our armor, the adversary sees it, aims at it, and is sure to hit it.

Your vulnerable point may be selfishness or pride of life, or ambition or a passionate temper, or penuriousness or slothfulness, or an unreasoning zeal—no matter what it may be, Satan spies it before you do yourself, and brings all his skill to bear upon it. His temptations always go easily and smoothly with our inclinations. But with all Satan's skill and power, we are not necessarily at his mercy. Thank God, he can be met and overcome. St. Peter says: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour; whom resist, steadfast in the faith."

Resistance, in the name of Christ, will secure for us the mastery. Satan can tempt, but can not destroy a steadfast soul. He can never gain possession of us except by a voluntary surrender on our own part. His strongest fetters will be like the green withes about the limbs of Samson, so long as we maintain our integrity. If we hold on to Christ it will always be a question of his almightiness set over against Satan's strength; and who can doubt the result?

Temptation is one of the legitimate results of conversion. So long as we patiently grind in the devil's mill, he leaves us in comparative quiet; but as soon as we, by God's grace, break his bonds and fly toward Christ and heaven, Satan, fearful of losing his thralls, pursues us with all his outlawed band, even to the very borders of the eternal world.

Lest my young reader should think, when he is

tempted, that some strange thing has befallen him, let me quote from a reliable source the following fact: "It is recorded of John Knox, that greatest of Scotchmen, the man who had struggled through untold opposition that he might re-establish the true Church, that his hardest battle with the tempter was fought upon his sick-bed just the night before he died. Satan first attempted to fill his mind with doubts; failing in this, he tried to persuade him that for his own sake, because of the great work that he had wrought as a reformer, and because of his rare merit as a defender of the truth, God would save him in his extremity, and grant him a crown at last; thus attempting to drive the old hero from his Protestant stronghold of salvation by faith to that miserable Romish refuge of lies, salvation by works. It was a terrible struggle; but then, as always, the believing saint was conqueror. Exhausted, yet victorious, he prevailed through his obstinate faith in the Scripture: 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

In God's plan for our development temptation seems to be necessary. When we see a strong man in the Church we find that he has not gained his high position by a sudden bound. He has not even attained it by the careful elaboration of a mere religious theory. It is the result of years of prayer, careful study of the Word, and practical conflict with opposing influences in the painstaking discharge of duty. Conquering

difficulties makes men strong physically, intellectually, and, especially, morally. Temptation is necessary to prove the genuineness of a man's Christian character, the integrity of his purpose, so that God and the Church, and the world and even the man himself may know that he is invulnerable.

It is said that Napoleon I ordered a shirt of mail, which was to be bullet-proof. "When the artisan completed it he delivered it to the emperor, who ordered him to put it upon himself. Then Napoleon, taking a pistol, fired shot after shot at the man in armor. It stood this severe test; and the emperor bestowed upon the maker a large reward." Precisely so with the Christian's armor spoken of by St. Paul in the sixth chapter of Ephesians. It must appear by actual and sometimes fearful trial that the Christian soldier has on this complete armor, that it is properly arranged, and that it is bullet-proof. In view of the great tests of the future, we can not afford to be in any doubt upon this subject.

Young Christian, never forget that if you are honest in every fight with the tempter, God is on your side. His promises are many, and they are sure. Says an instructive writer: "You will find by reference to ancient customs that the Tyrians used to bind their idol gods with golden chains, lest in time of danger they should desert their worshipers and betray their trust. But our God has freely bound himself with the chain of his promises, that he will never leave us nor forsake us."

We will take time here to look at but two links in the chain. God tells us in his Word that: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." A writer in "Man and the Gospel," gives the following illustrative comment upon this promise: "'The Chronicles of Froissart' relate the strange issue of a siege which took place in the days of chivalry-and somewhere, I think, in France. Though gallantly defended, the outworks of the citadel had been carried. The breach was practicable; to-morrow was fixed for the assault. That none might escape under the cloud of night, the besiegers guarded every sally-port, and, indeed, the whole sweep of wall. They had the garrison in a net, and only waited for the morrow to secure or slaughter them. The night wore heavily on; no sortie was attempted, no sound came from the beleagured citadel; its brave but ill-starred defenders seemed to wait their doom in silence. The morning came; with its dawn the stormers rushed at the breach; sword in hand they poured in to find the nest empty, cold. The bird was flown; the prey escaped. But how? That was a mystery; it seemed a miracle, until an opening was discovered, that led by a flight of steps down into the bowels of the rock. They descended, and explored their way with cautious steps and lighted torches, until this subterranean passage led them out a long

way off from the citadel, among quiet, green fields and the light of day. It was plain that by this passage, the doors of which stood open, their prey had escaped under cover of night. A clever device, a wise precaution. It was a refuge of the besieged, provided against such a crisis. And when affairs seem desperate, and the worst comes to the worst, how should it encourage God's people to remember that he has promised them as safe a retreat."

Then here is a second promise, equally precious: "For he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." The Greek of this passage has five negatives, and may more literally and forcibly be translated thus: "I will not, I will not leave thee; I will never, never, never forsake thee." The precious promise is renewed five times, that it may be indelibly impressed upon our hearts and bring us peace in the most trying hour. It is no sin to be tempted, and no sign of weakness or want of acceptance with God. But in giving way to temptation, when we have this cloud of gracious promises, in that is the sin. The best means of resistance to temptation are prayer and watchfulness; prayer, because that links almightiness and omniscience to our weakness and ignorance; watchfulness, because Satan and his trained engineers undermine as often as they assault.

Let me also recommend to you two precautionary means of resistance: First, always fight Satan with your own weapons. Christ met and vanquished the tempter with the "sword of the Spirit, which is the

Word of God:" and this sword is the sure reliance of every Christian soldier. It belongs of right to you. Grasp it then with a firm hand. Do n't doubt it. It will never fail you. Its temper is perfect. It has been fully tested; and "no weapon formed against it shall prosper." In one of Scott's rare poems a duel is described between a Scotch Highlander and a Lowland knight. The Highlander had always been accustomed to fight with a broadsword and shield; but in courtesy to his antagonist, who had only a light sword, he threw his shield upon the ground. The fight went on, but the Highlander was at a serious disadvantage, and, although the stronger of the two, was soon stretched helplessly upon the plain. Thus will it always be with the Christian, if he consent, from courtesy or any other reason, to dispense with any portion of his spiritual armor which he is accustomed to use. He will certainly be worsted in the fight. But if, in spite of the promptings of a false courtesy, if, in spite of the allurements or threats of the adversary, the soldier of Christ keeps on the whole armor, and wields every weapon with which he is provided, he will come off "more than conqueror."

Second, always fight Satan upon your own ground. The attacking party always labors under a disadvantage; and a nation can maintain a longer and surer war in its own territory than when it engages upon the soil of its enemy. So with the Christian in this great fight; standing upon Gospel soil, entrenched behind God's promises, and thus putting himself on the de-

fensive, he is absolutely unconquerable. But if, under the influence of a false spirit of liberality, he allows himself to drift into such places and such company as are plainly forbidden by God's Word, then Satan, catching him away from home, will have him at a disadvantage, and easily bind him hand and foot. God's people are a peculiar people. They have a home of their own, a work of their own, society of their own, amusements of their own; and, while they put forth every legitimate effort to win others from the power of Satan unto God, let them have decision enough, sense enough, and courage enough to stay at home and mind their own business.

"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him."

### Chapter XIII.

#### THE CALL TO THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

THE Christian ministry is not a mere profession, to be selected from personal considerations; it is a divine calling, into which no man should dare to enter without the divine sanction. Much as the Christian Church needs well-trained ministers, let it be understood that she depends upon God to call the right men at the right time. The young man who adopts the ministry as other men adopt the law, the army, or the navy, and goes through the routine of its duties with the coldness of a mere official, will never comprehend its true mission, and will never attain to real success in it. Whatever his intellectual attainments, he can not feed the flock of Christ. creasing numbers may gather about him, but they will be connected to the preacher rather than to Christ. There may be intellectual food and growth, but there will be little, if any, spiritual power.

Cowdray has said with equal keenness and quaintness: "Like as if a stranger should violently thrust himself in to be the shepherd of thy sheep, thou wouldst ask him who sent for him, what he had to do there; and thou wouldst rather think him to be a thief, and a murderer of thy sheep, than to be a faithful and trusty servant. So, surely if thou come to

take charge of God's people before he inwardly move thy conscience to pity his people, and outwardly, by order, call and place thee where he thinks good, he will judge thee a thief, a wolf, a devourer, and not a feeder."

I know that some men, already in the pulpit, sneer at this doctrine, and insist that any man who thinks he would like the work of the pulpit, and be successful in it as a profession, and who possesses a fair amount of mental culture, with a tolerable degree of piety, is as much called to this position as are others, and is free to choose it or let it alone, as he may elect. But such ministers, in the meager results of their own lives, will usually remind us of the clergyman, who contending against this fundamental doctrine, said, "I took up preaching, because, every thing considered, I regarded it as the most desirable of all the learned professions; I never believed myself called to preach." Whereupon an acquaintance replied, "No other person ever believed it, either."

Let me say to any young man whose attention has been turned toward the ministry, Be cautious—prayerfully, thoughtfully cautious. If it is plainly your duty, it will be fully made known to you. You need not live in uncertainty; neither need you "run before you are sent." But, if God has really called you, and opens the way before you, be more cautious, even, how you refuse.

"But," you say, "how am I to know that I am called to this great work?" I answer, by several con-

curring proofs. If, while you are prayerfully holding yourself in the path of duty, and are ready to step into every open door of usefulness, you become conscious of an abiding conviction—not a mere impression, but settled sense of obligation—that God has called you to this work, you may regard this as the first link in the chain of evidence. You must then wait for the voice of the Church. But if, after patiently waiting for a reasonable length of time without receiving the summons of the Church, you still possess the same sense of duty, you may then, with perfect propriety, reveal your feelings to the brethren; provided you have, in the mean time, been steadfast in the work of the Church, so that the society is familiar with you and your capabilities. Although the brethren may never have thought of you as a candidate for the ministry, still it is possible that when your convictions are opened to them, they may, after due reflection, fully concur in your opinion; for it may be God's order through you to first bring this matter to their notice.

If you are looking toward the ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church, I may with propriety call your attention to the fact that, by explicit direction of the Book of Discipline, the brethren are to judge of the genuineness of your call by the following questions:

"Does he know God as a pardoning God? Has he the love of God abiding in him? Does he desire nothing but God? Is he holy in all manner of conversation? Has he gifts—as well as grace—for the work? Has he a clear, sound understanding; a right judgment in the things of God; a just conception of salvation by faith? Has God given him a good degree of utterance? Does he speak justly, readily, clearly? Has he fruit? Are any truly convinced of sin, and converted to God by his efforts? As long as these marks concur in any one, we believe he is called of God to preach. These we receive as sufficient proof that he is moved by the Holy Spirit."

Here, then, you have a sufficient answer to your question, "How am I to know that I am called of God?" If these proofs combine to demonstrate your duty to God and the Church, there is no room for prejudice or self-interest. It is of no avail to plead your inability or sense of weakness. You must preach the Gospel; relying upon the promise, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end."

If God calls you to preach, he first calls you, in these days of schools and colleges, thoroughly to educate yourself with direct reference to this important office; taking care, all the time, that your heart is kept right, and that your spiritual development does not lag. "But," you say, "I have not the means, or the opportunity for a liberal education." I answer: Begin the work and God will supplement your zeal and your industry by opening the way just as far as he desires you to go in this direction. In such case he will most graciously fill you with a sweet consciousness of his presence and favor; supporting you in

every trial, and inspiring you with the true apostolic courage and constancy.

"Between Christianity and true culture there have always been, not antagonisms, but strongest sympathies and alliances. Point to a period in history when the Church has been imbued with the spirit of vital Christianity, and it will be found that there, especially, consecrated culture in the pulpit was molding thought and elevating piety in the pews. Progressive movements of high religious character have had their beginning, not in the pew, as a rule, but in the pulpit; and polished instrumentalities have been usually the divine selections. It is the greatest error to suppose that the interests of truth are better subserved by ignorance than by culture, or that consecrated discipline has not been a favorite of providence in the promulgation of truth. The ancient cities of the Levites were seats of learning. The schools of the prophets were not, in scholastic respects, unlike the academies of the Greek philosophers. The disciples of our Lord possessed rare educational advantages. Indeed, their professional training was extensive and extraordinary. They had for three years the personal instructions and models of the world's Teacher. Instructor was most thoroughly intellectual. How he stimulated thought, awakened curiosity, and startled men to inquire, 'How can these things be?' He ever excited men to grapple with his words, and at length to say, 'Declare unto us this parable.' Men did not sit at their ease when he preached. They worked on

his great ideas. They tasked themselves to grasp his meaning, and revolve what he had thrown before them. 'He stood above his hearers. He dropped seeds down into their minds. These minds acted on the seed in darkness for a time, but still acted; and, when the time was fulfilled, the seed swelled out and grew up, and bore fruit; and after he was glorified, his disciples remembered his words and wondered at their germinating power.' To such preaching for three years did the apostles listen. What candidate for the ministry in our day has before him for that length of time, nay, for any time, such a model?"\*

Perhaps you say, "I am involved in business plans and projects," or, "I am entering upon the study and practice of a profession; and while I acknowledge that under other circumstances it would probably be my duty to engage in this work, now I am certainly free to follow my own inclinations." No, you are not free. Duty is duty, and you can in no case evade it and maintain your acceptance with God. Unless your case is an extremely exceptional one, you must at once abandon all inferior pursuits, that you may accept this holy trust.

All your business experience and all your technical knowledge in other directions will be of value to you here, for you are entering upon a study to which all knowledge is tributary, and a work which, in its results, has to do with every occupation in which men

<sup>\*&</sup>quot;The Sword and Garment," p. 50.

engage. Peter and Andrew were engaged in the important work of fishing, and in this business no doubt they had invested all their capital; but at the command of Jesus, with unquestioning obedience, they left their nets and followed him, that he might make them fishers of men. Matthew was collector of customs at one of the most important ports of entry in the province of Galilee; and yet when Jesus said, "Follow me," he entered into no arguments, made no plea of important business engagements that could not be neglected, but with a sublimely simple trust in the divine wisdom, "he arose and followed him." And shall you be less prompt and self-sacrificing in obeying the Master's call?

Every Christian young man should hold himself in readiness to do his best in whatever field the Master may place him. Those young men who apply themselves to the common work of the Church, looking after the interests of the prayer and class-meetings, visiting the poor and sick, offering a willing heart and hand to the Sunday-school, gathering the unconverted into the congregation on the Lord's day, putting forth every possible effort for the salvation of souls, all the time praying and studying that they may increase in capacity and power, are dear to the pastor's heart and are far wiser than those who attempt at one mighty stride to mount from the pew to the pulpit. Such young men need spend no time in struggling with doubts as to duty, or anxious queries in regard to their proper course in life. Keeping to the work nearest at hand, it is possible they may fill up their measure of obligation in the ranks of the laity, where they are so much needed. But if God has work higher and more important for them to do, they are just the ones to take up that work at a proper time, and push it on to success. The Church wants no men in the pulpit who are not as willing to employ their talents in any other department of Church service.

Once in the ministry, let me exhort you to show your estimate of the sacredness of your holy calling by being most persistently a man of one work. Do not be found "with a Discipline in one pocket and a commission as agent for a life insurance company in the other;" for it is far better to leave the ministerial ranks altogether, than to bring contempt upon the office by combining its functions with business plans and purposes. Any thing but a Rev. Sewing-machine Agent, or speculator in horses, or stocks or houses, or lands. Let the man whom God has called be either a faithful pastor or a diligent business man; he can not possibly be both.

The minister who, in poverty or in plenty, lives a life of strict devotion to his work, who manifests a Christ-like zeal for the salvation of men, and who makes it evident to all that he is impelled by a noble and exalted piety, will inspire our young men with a holy emulation. Their generous impulses and youthful ardor for Christ, under such a stimulus, will lift them above the world, and make them free to toil and self-abnegation for Christ's sake and the Gospel's.

This subject has claims upon the attention of the unconverted young men of our congregation; young men who have all the other qualifications, yet regard themselves as excused from the Christian ministry because they are not now pious. They say, "We admit that this work is of the very first importance. It is indispensable to the progress of civilization. It will be foremost among the agencies that shall harmonize the incongruous elements of our American society. It is accomplishing for pagan lands what no other influence can. It will be our main defense against the encroachments of Jesuitism. It furnishes an inspiration and an object for science, art, and commerce. It gives value to property, and security to life. The world can not do without it. It must be upheld, and its influence extended. But we must be excused from all personal responsibility in this matter, because we are not professedly religious. We can get along in the law, or the medical profession, or in business, without piety, but we are unfitted for this work; so we consider ourselves fairly excused."

Young man, who has excused you? Did God, when he so richly endowed you with mental and moral talents, and gave you so many opportunities to improve upon them? Does not your avowed conviction, as to the mission of Christianity in the world, commit you to a responsibility in this work? The very necessities of the ministry are your call to penitence and faith. In my own early experience, the conviction that I was called to, and in some respect,

at least, endowed for, the ministry, and that the Church needed devoted laborers, was prominent among the influences that brought me to Christ and the cross.

Where, in God's Word, do you find the slightest warrant for ignoring all personal obligation to the Church, simply because you are an impenitent sinner? No, no, you can not reason thus; "this ought ye to have done, and not to have left the other undone." Receiving the light of the Gospel; blessed with the instructions of a Christian home; surrounded by the blessed results of Christian labor, your lack of personal piety only increases your condemnation. The divine monitor in your breast is an "accusing" rather than an "excusing" conscience. Let me entreat you to remember, in the flush and strength of your early manhood, that the purity and piety of old age can not compensate the mistakes of early life.

It is said that "Dr. Nathan Bangs was once asked by an aged layman who had refused, in early life, to obey his conscience summoning him into the ministry: 'Is it possible for a man, after having through a long life remained out of the office to which God was calling him, is it possible for such a man to get into heaven?' Dr. Bangs bowed his head and remained in deep thought, until he broke the silence with this answer: 'Brother, there may be a possibility of his getting into heaven; but another will take his crown.'"

God forbid, young man, that another should take your crown.

## Chapter XIV.

## FICTION--RULES FOR READING—THE RELIGIOUS NEWSPAPER.

"'T is not for man to trifle! Life is brief,
And sin is here.

Our age is but the falling of a leaf,
A dropping tear.

We have no time to sport away the hours,
All must be earnest in a world like ours."

THIS is pre-eminently an age of book-making and book-reading. This fact, although a hopeful one in itself, is a source of anxiety to thoughtful men who observe the kind of books made and read. Works of fiction, from the best to the poorest, are having an unprecedented sale; and upon the shelves of the bookstore and the library they are literally crowding out better books. The newspaper has become a great power in the land, and constitutes the sole reading of a large class of people. To meet the popular demand, illustrated newspapers have been multiplied, sprinkled here and there with scraps of news, dashes of scientific facts, and patches of moral sentiment, but mainly devoted to the lowest grade of romance, disgusting to other than an inexperienced or morbid taste. A perfect army of writers is employed to furnish tales, novels, and novelettes for this circulation.

Many religious newspapers have so far yielded to the popular demand as to furnish second-class serial stories. Even our Church libraries have caught the infection, and the average Sunday-school book has come to be a weak solution of story and sermon, alike dissipating to the mind of the scholar and subversive of the real design of the school. Our Sunday-school libraries are fairly flooded with this weak, "goodish" literature until hardly a vestige of more solid reading survives. Especially is this true where the carefully edited Sunday-school books of our denominational publishing-house are entirely ignored by committees, and the supply is furnished by irresponsible houses.

Indiscriminate novel-reading tends to destroy the taste for other and more substantial reading. Familiarity with popular fiction gives a disrelish for simple truth, and engenders the pernicious habit of reading merely for amusement. This destroys the love of sober investigation; it renders science, history, biography, critical essays, and books of travel tedious and unattractive; it dwarfs the memory and reasoning powers, and makes the imagination morbid and unhealthy by constant excitement.

Let a young man or woman accustom the mind to this unnatural excitement, and it will soon be evident that when it is not under the influence of that stimulant by reaction, it sinks to such an insensible state that solid reading can not arouse it to interest. The mind is very like the body in this respect. Let a man accustom himself to the use of stimulants (such as wine, brandy, or tobacco), and soon he will be utterly unable to arouse himself to great exertions and to call out all the energies of his nature without the aid of such stimulants. On the contrary, if he accustoms himself to a strong, healthy diet, without unnatural stimulants, he can, at any time, command his entire energies, bringing them to bear upon the accomplishment of his object.

So, the mind of the habitual novel-reader is debauched by the wine, the brandy, and the tobacco of literature; and it will take no interest in a book that does not contain these elements; it can not be aroused to activity in any other way. I have the proof of this in the experience of every confirmed novel-reader.

A Christian lady, who, unfortunately, formed the habit of novel-reading at an early age, says: "I could make any earthly sacrifice could I thirst after the Bible and other instructive books, as I have after novels. The greatest daily cross I am called to take up is to pass by a novel without reading it. I would say, as a warning to all my sex, beware of this fatal rock; beware of wasting not only days, but nights, to make yourselves fools all the rest of your life."

I am often asked: What rules should be adopted, by a young person, in reading the better class of fiction?

Dr. Curry says: "While we are free to declare our conviction that for the most part fictitious literature is miserably poor provender for the mind, we can also at-

test the real value of *some* novels that we have read." None of us, probably, are prepared to say that under no circumstances should a work of the better kind of fiction be read. It may sometimes be a recreation, and the delineations of manners and customs in romance are often helps to details in history. Many works of fiction may be read with safety, some even with profit. But the very greatest care is necessary, in reading even the *best* of novels, lest too great familiarity with such literature should relax the mind, pervert its powers, and disqualify the heart for the active virtues of life.

In attempting to give advice upon this point, I am fully aware of the difficulties in the way, not the least of which is the disposition of the young to take advantage of a reasonable license in certain things, and decidedly overdo the matter. But I am impressed with the fact that an indiscriminate condemnation of novel-reading is not wise; such a rule is too extreme. This course will cut off the ears of our young people, so that they will not listen to what we have to say upon this subject. I am also impressed with the importance of careful advice to the young, by way of instructing their inexperience, and leading them to a wise course, as regards light literature; and the end to be secured, is, at least, worthy the prayerful, thoughtful attempt.

In offering some advice upon this subject, let me say: Read works of fiction only as a recreation and relaxation from severe mental labor. If you have but

little time for reading and study, spend none of it in this way. The time is short. "There was an ancient custom of putting an hour-glass into the coffin of the dead, to signify that their time had run out. A useless notification to them. Better put the hour-glass into the hand of every living man, and show him the grains gliding steadily out. Soon all will be gone." But by rescuing a little from the regular occupation of the day, the mind may be disciplined, and stored with useful knowledge. Professor Tyndall, whose fame as a scientist now extends over the world, gained the preparation for his brilliant career by the faithful use of five hours a day, which he secured in the early morning, before he began his arduous labors as a surveyor. The constant study of a professional man or woman may be relieved, now and then, with a little carefully selected light reading; but to devote all one's leisure time to such literature will leave the mind impoverished and unhealthy.

I can not but place a very high estimate upon some works of the imagination, such as Shakespeare's, Irving's, Hawthorne's, Miss Mulock's, and a part of Mrs. Stowe's, and I certainly think they can be read with profit; but to read only such books would be the next thing to starving the mind. The physical man can not live and be healthy, and grow strong on the pulpy, juicy fruits alone, however pleasant and desirable they may be as an occasional dessert. He must have strong meat. So, let me say to the young man or woman, whose principal time is taken up by

necessary physical employment, use the little leisure you have in making yourself familiar with instructive books, such as history, biography, travels, and science. Make the most of your spare hours; and you may yet be able to exhibit a mental training and culture, which shall shame the listless dreamer whose opportunities you may now be tempted to covet. You, certainly, have very little, if any, time to spend on works of fiction. Only now and then an hour, at most, can be profitably employed in this way.

Read only classics—those works of fiction that are of acknowledged merit, and are legitimate in their conception and aim. If you have much time for reading, then a part of it may be spent profitably in this way; but do not fail to make the most careful selection.

Coleridge divides readers into four classes. "The first," he says, "may be compared to an hour-glass, their reading being as the sand; it runs in, and runs out, and leaves not a vestige behind. A second class resembles a sponge, which imbibes every thing, and returns it in nearly the same state, only a little dirtier. A third class is like a jelly bag, which allows all that is pure to pass away, and retains only the refuse and the dregs. The fourth class may be compared to the slave in the diamond mines of Golconda, who, casting aside all that is worthless, preserves only the pure gem."

If you are inclined to make the most of yourself and your opportunities, you are very careful in choosing your friends, and admit but few to an intimate

association. Be equally select and sparing in your choice of books, and especially this class of books. Your sphere may be humble and limited, and yet, by care upon this point, you may be regularly associated with the best minds; and not only secure the incalculable benefit of their knowledge and culture, but be animated by their high and noble purposes. You are just as welcome to the best literary company as to the poorest; you can choose between princes and paupers. And, as your own mind will inevitably take its tone from the authors with whom you associate, your responsibility can not be lightly estimated. Books should never be read for amusement merely; they should be read for a definite purpose. Hence it is wise for you to read but few books, such as can be well digested, and, by careful thought, made vour own.

Much of the popular religious reading of the day will have to be classed among novels, and many noble names are identified with this branch of literature. Still we can give to the religious novel but a qualified approval. You will have need of wisdom in selecting even here. If, however, you select a few of the choicest, you can peruse them with mental and spiritual profit.

There are a few works of fiction, secular as well as religious, that are pure and good, true to nature and society, and yet written in the interests of good morals. These, read at proper times, will elevate and instruct as well as entertain. Seek the aid and advice of some

person of good judgment and experience, in making such selection. Do not depend upon publisher's puffs, or irresponsible book notices; but be as jealous in this matter as a banker would be in watching for bad money. If you have no reliable source of information, upon this subject, you had better let such works alone altogether, and spend your time upon that which you know to be safe. It would be far better for you to turn famishing away from a bountiful feast, rather than risk eating the one poisonous dish that has been skillfully placed with the many that are wholesome. You can not possibly be too strict upon this point, for your mental and moral health depend upon your incorruptible vigilance.

Read only such fiction as you feel is worth reading for its own sake. As you read on, in the book you have chosen, if you do not feel that, at some future time, you could read it over again with pleasure and profit, then throw it aside at once. You can be better employed. A novel to be worth reading—to have any real intellectual food in it-must be natural in its conception; its aim must be definite, and its characters must be sharply drawn. It must have an undeniable claim upon our consideration as a work of art. If this is the case with the book in hand, you will feel that it is well worth reading again, and your interest will increase with the second perusal. Let a young person follow up this rule, reading only such books, and his or her taste will soon become so refined that trash will be detected with ease. Such a one will

shrink from a bad book as instinctively as a sensitive plant shrinks from a rude touch.

When you find that your limited reading of fiction interferes, in the least, with your mental or moral duties, then let it alone altogether. With some, even a little such reading will be productive of these results. In such cases total abstinence is the only safe rule. But in all cases where fiction lessens your desire for more substantial reading and study, or where it conflicts with your religious activities, the little good to be derived can not compensate the evil. This is true even of the so-called religious fiction, and, with all its excellences, it must not be allowed to draw the attention or interest away from Bible study, secret prayer, religious duty, or the study of solid works in the various departments of literature.

Many young Christians have suffered themselves to drift into the habit of immoderate reading of the best and the purest fiction, until, before they were quite aware of it, books of religious instruction, glowing with celestial fire, have lost their interest, and a life of religious devotion has ceased to be attractive, or even desirable. Hundreds of apostates from God and the Church can point to excessive novel-reading (which they failed to check even when the danger was made plain to them) as the rock upon which they made shipwreck of their faith. Many others, who have, at times, been almost persuaded to be Christians—who have been just on the point of yielding to the Spirit, and beginning a life of real success,

have quieted their consciences and stifled their convictions, by plunging deeper and deeper into this mental dissipation—until they have lost all thought of a personal consecration to God. In this, Satan furnishes a ready means of grieving away the Holy Spirit.

When you find that you can not readily, and with interest turn from the novel you are reading to a more substantial intellectual repast, or when you find that your taste for works of imagination leads you to demand a fanciful style even in books of history, biography, or science—in short, when your mind needs to be amused and cheated into the reception of valuable knowledge, then the sooner you drop fiction altogether, the better. At any rate, abandon it until your mental powers have regained their normal tone.

I know that these rules will be regarded by some as very strict; but strictness is a necessity. Better to err upon this side, than upon the side of looseness. The enormity of the evil to be averted justifies the greatest jealousy in our treatment of this subject.

My young friends—especially those who have become addicted to this pernicious habit—let me urge you to think earnestly upon this subject. It concerns you intellectually and morally. It concerns your success in life, and your safety in eternity. Beware, beware of this evil. It will poison your mind, it will ruin your soul. God purposes better things for you. The Church and the world want cultivated minds as well as regenerate hearts; and with all your opportunities you have no time to spend on trifles, or in doing

that which will have to be undone. All about you are the materials for a perfect intellectual temple. May you be so divinely directed in your choice that every stone you place in the walls may be worthy and enduring; while the whole shall constitute a fitting support for the top-stone, which shall be perfect love to God and men.

#### THE RELIGIOUS NEWSPAPER.

As an indispensable help to intellectual and spiritual culture, the young Christian should have regular access to at least one Church paper. An independent religious paper, or one of some other denomination, will be of value, and may be profitably read, if time and means will allow; but first of all let him take, and read with care, the official organ of the denomination with which he is connected. No other periodical should be permitted to take its place; no other can do him so much good.

A good Church paper is a great power, and nowhere else is that power more immediately and satisfactorily felt than in the expanding life of an intelligent young man or woman, consecrated to the service of Christ. The well conducted religious paper is a good commentary on the Bible, furnishing direct exposition, interesting religious biography, which illustrates in the freshest possible manner practical religious truth, as well as all kinds of facts showing the present power of the Gospel and success of the Church. It contains in every issue something to arouse the in-

different to action, direct the inquirer, cheer the afflicted, instruct the faithful worker in the best methods, strengthen the burdened, give courage to the tempted and tried, and especially to inspire the inexperienced with a zeal which shall be according to knowledge.

The young Christian needs to be always ready to assault error in its most dangerous forms, as well as to defend the citadel of truth where it is most likely to be attacked; he needs the stimulation of fresh ideas, and an extended view of the great field of Christian activities; he needs to be thoroughly informed in regard to the methods and operations of his own denomination; he needs to be familiar with its missionary movements, and all the various organizations for promoting its growth and increasing its influence for good, and this not only because of the effort he will thus be prompted to put forth, but because of the healthful influence upon his own spiritual life of the love and sympathy and self-abnegation which will thus be aroused within him; he needs to have his mind and heart liberalized by a knowledge of what is being done by other congregations, and by other denominations, and he constantly needs to be stirred up to better work by a knowledge of their efficiency and success; he needs to know many things in regard to what is expected of a progressive Churchmember, and which his pastor can not, or will not, for obvious reasons mention to him.

Now all this will be regularly and judiciously sup-

plied by the weekly Church paper, which not only brings the best thoughts of its experienced editors, but commands the services of the most competent contributors in the literary and scientific, as well as strictly religious, departments. A Church-member who regularly reads the paper of his denomination will not only be better informed than the one who does not, but he will be more liberal to local as well as general Church enterprises; he will be a better hearer and worshiper in the sanctuary, and will show a more rapid growth in all those qualities which go to make up a symmetrical and valuable Christian character. An experienced pastor expects much of the member who reads the Church paper, while frequent disappointments have taught him not to rely for either appreciative sympathy or efficient help upon the parishioner who ignores the weekly visitant, and chooses instead the political daily or the popular magazine. If your pastor is faithful and wise, he will at once call your attention to this important help in your religious life; and he will do this quite as much for his own sake as for yours, knowing that his work would be greatly lightened and his success more certain if this "assistant pastor" could be introduced into every household.

Therefore, my young reader, next to your Bible, and before all purely secular reading—valuable as very much of it is—be sure to subscribe for and thoughtfully read your regular Church paper.

## Chapter XV.

#### SYSTEMATIC BENEFICENCE.

[BY REV. O. A. HOUGHTON, A. M.]

"Follow with reverent steps the great example
Of Him whose holy work was 'doing good;'
So shall the wide earth seem our Father's temple,
Each loving life a psalm of gratitude."

-WHITTIER.

IT is a significant fact that every enterprise of the Christian Church is dependent upon a legitimate use of money. Far from that one-sided view of religion that sets no value on earthly possessions, our Lord taught that the Gospel was to be propagated in the earth by the monetary offerings of his people freely and lovingly rendered. Moreover this benevolence must be a constant flow to meet a constant demand. All the great missionary enterprises of the Church, home and foreign, are planned and pushed forward on a full faith that this benevolence will not cease. No Christian Church has a right to exist as such that is not missionary in its spirit and activities. The life of the Church, like the life of God, is a perpetual outflow of beneficence. Our Lord enjoins stated and constant offerings of money that the habit of benevolence may be cultivated in all his children.

There is no other way of salvation from selfishness. The heathen need our help, to be sure, but we equally need to help them for our own sakes. The reflex benefit on our hearts of money offerings to God is the primary object of their requirement. If our gifts be not rendered freely and lovingly as unto God, this effect is not realized, and the purpose of the law of benevolence is defeated.

This law also makes God a partner with us in business. If the measure of our beneficence be a tenth of our income, we shall prove that ninety cents with his blessing is worth far more to us than the whole dollar without his approval. It is well for us to remember that our property is not the result of our shrewdness, prudence, or industry. Others equally prudent and diligent are reduced to poverty in an hour by calamity or misfortune. The fact is, we do not own what we possess. Ownership, or the right to use a thing with absolute reference to one's own will, is in God alone. We are stewards, not proprietors. Property must be used according to the will of the Sovereign Proprietor. A selfish use of our possessions is robbery of God. Besides, property is valuable only when rightly used. To the miser, the spendthrift, the sensualist, money is a positive damage. Property is of no value to any one who does not use it according to God's will. But God permits us to claim all investments made according to his will as so much treasure laid up in heaven. A man may so use his pittance or his abundance according as God has prospered him or withheld from him, as that it shall be transmuted into heavenly treasure, and so he becomes "rich toward God."

Ultimately, therefore, a man will save just what he gives away with the pure intent to glorify God. To hoard money even with the purpose to will it to benevolent objects at death is positive disobedience. This is an age of perversion of wills. The only way to insure a right disposal of property is for every man to be his own executor. He may do this in the practice of benevolence according to the law of Christ, and thus through life cultivate in himself those dispositions of soul that the practice of benevolence is designed specially to produce.

But what is the measure and method of Christian beneficence? Taking a careful survey of the Old Testament law of tithes and offerings, including the "shekels for the sanctuary" and corners of the fields, gleanings and spontaneous growth to be left for the poor, we find that a conscientious and devout Jew could scarcely discharge his obligations with less than one-third his entire income. What is the startling inference? Has Christianity in her practice lowered the standard of beneficence? In the centenary year the Methodist Episcopal Church consecrated over nine millions of dollars to God. Much of this was for local purposes, and far from being disinterested benevolence; and yet, granting that it was all pure benevolence, it aggregated only one-fourth what it ought to amount to every year. When the Church comes to the recognition and practice of the divine law of beneficence she will annually quadruple this offering. Much of her benevolence is spasmodic rather than systematic. It goes by impulse under the inspiration of great occasions or the power of special pleadings. The special need of the hour is system in benevolence. God's command is not only to give, but to give regularly and with exact reference to our income. The representative passage is 1 Cor. xvi, 1, 2: "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the Churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come."

No doubt the question, "What proportion of my income ought to be consecrated to God?" has already risen in the minds of my readers. If I mistake not, you will not find a fixed ratio named in the Bible. The fact is, God has left it for love to devise. However, it must be "As God hath prospered" us. Circumstances also affect the case. After a careful consideration of the divine law of beneficence, I conclude that people in comfortable circumstances ought, at least, to consecrate a tenth. The poor would doubtless discharge their full responsibilities with less, while the rich should evidently give much more. No Christian can conscientiously consume upon himself and family more than enough for their comfort, convenience, and culture. Let it be observed that, in the estimate above made, of the amount required by the Old Tes-

tament law, there is included the portion for the expensive temple worship and the liberal support of the priestly tribe. But the support of the Church to which we belong is not a benevolence. It is the payment of a just claim, the full equivalent of which is received—a claim which it would be indecent and dishonest to ignore. Every member of the Methodist Episcopal Church has in the most solemn manner vowed to contribute his full share towards its expenses. If he does not do this cheerfully and willingly without waiting to have it squeezed out of him by an abused and over-burdened officiary, his vow is broken, and on his own soul rests the guilt and condemnation. No honorable man will enjoy the full benefits of a well furnished church and well sustained service and not contribute his full share towards its financial necessities. No worship on earth, true or false, is so inexpensive as American Protestant Christian worship. It should be so in order that the great strength of the Church may be put forth in purely disinterested benevolence. No doubt there are circumstances which justify men in turning all their benevolent funds to the support of a Church in some given locality, which, but for their contributions, would be entirely abandoned. But ordinarily the support of the Church to which we belong is not a benevolence. Notice, now, in the above quoted passage of Scripture, the apostle had given the same order to "the Churches of Galatia" that he here gives to the "Church of God which is at Corinth," and this epistle is also addressed

"to all in every place" "who call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord." It is to all Christians, therefore, a command to systematic beneficence, as plain a command as "Thou shalt not steal." It is not simply advisory counsel that may be followed or not, but an "order," requiring not only benevolence, but benevolence in a specific, systematic manner.

Doubtless offerings are better made weekly where circumstances will permit, especially by the great masses of the people whose income is small and received weekly. If men do not give when they have money, they certainly will not give at all. And to give regularly as we receive is the only proper way to make benevolence a means of grace to us. To make provision in one's will for the devotion of wealth to God is not sufficient. The heart must be constantly cultivated by perpetual offerings. There is a special propriety in making such offerings on the Sabbath day. The act is then connected with worship, and becomes an act of devotion. It is done unto Jesus. At least the benevolence must be stated, systematic, regular, or this command of the apostle will not be fully obeyed. It must not be left to impulse, for giving entirely from impulse is only another name for gratifying self. This Paul would guard against. The matter of their beneficence must not be controlled by his personal presence nor by pathetic pictures of the needs of the suffering saints at Jerusalem. True, he might have obtained a larger collection in this particular case had

he taken that course, but he sought rather to establish a habit of benevolence upon principles which would be practicable for the Church in every age. The fact that somebody will suffer if we do not give, is not the best reason for giving. The Scriptures do not base their appeal for beneficence upon the distresses of others. There are higher and better reasons. They are found in our obligations to Christ who "though he was rich, yet, for our sakes, he became poor;" in the fact that we have already given "our own selves to the Lord," involving the gift of all required of us or needed from us; in the necessity of proving to ourselves and to the world the sincerity of our love; in the absolute necessity of cultivating ourselves in one of the cardinal graces; in the duty of acknowledging God as the author of all our blessings, and in the privilege of devoutly making love-offerings to him who hath "loved us unto death." If professedly Christian people would but recognize and act upon these reasons for beneficence, the Church would not be disgraced by so frequent appeals to lower motives.

Observe also the command is to all alike, the poor as well as the rich. "As God hath prospered us," wrongs nobody. The rule is exactly adjusted to every body's abilities. The greatest charities and Church enterprises are maintained by the confluence of small and constant streams of beneficence. The excellence of the rule is seen in the fact that it unites the hearts of the poor and the rich, and conveys to

each class alike the blessings of giving. God does not seek to impose a burden, but rather to confer an inestimable privilege, and shall the poor be denied any privilege accorded to the rich? The divine law of beneficence puts it in the power of the poor to lay up as much treasure in heaven, or, in other words, to sacrifice as much, to express as much gratitude, to show as high an appreciation of obligations and benefits as the rich. The widow's mite, dropped from the skinny hand of poverty, is often more to Christ than the princely gift from the jeweled fingers of opulence. The bane of benevolence and Church enterprise is, waiting for the rich. Let no steward or trustee stand before a poor widow and deny her the privilege of making a love offering to the "God of the widow and the fatherless."

What right has any one who has never gone hungry, nor suffered for Christ's sake, nor practiced self-denial that he may help God's cause, to talk of being too poor to give any thing?

The following examples will serve to illustrate how perfectly practicable is this apostolic rule for both poor and rich: "A shoemaker being asked how he contrived to give so much, replied that it was easily done by obeying St. Paul's precept in 1 Cor. xvi, 2: 'Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him.' 'I earn,' said he, 'one day with another about a dollar a day, and I can, without inconvenience to myself or family, lay by five cents of this sum for charitable

purposes; the amount being thirty cents a week. My wife takes in sewing and washing, and earns something like two dollars a week, and she lays by ten cents of that. My children each of them earn a shilling or two, and are glad to contribute their penny; so that altogether we lay by us in store forty cents a week. And if we have been unusually prospered we contribute something more. The weekly amount is deposited every Sunday morning in a box kept for that purpose, and reserved for future use. Thus, by these small earnings, we have learned that it is more blessed to give than to receive. The yearly amount saved in this way is about twenty-five dollars; and I distribute this among the various benevolent societies, according to the best of my judgment."

The biography of eminently pious and useful men since the Reformation shows that great numbers of them have recognized the obligation statedly to devote a portion of their income to charitable uses. Lord Chief-justice Hale, Rev. Dr. Hammond, Baxter, Doddridge, and others regularly gave a tenth; Dr. Watts a fifth; Mrs. Rowe one-half. Rev. John Wesley, when his income was thirty pounds, lived on twenty-eight and gave two; and when his income rose to sixty pounds, and afterwards to one hundred and twenty, he still lived on twenty-eight, and gave all the remainder. Mr. Nathaniel R. Cobb, a merchant connected with the Baptist Church in Boston, in 1821, at the age of twenty-three, drew up and subscribed the following covenant, to which he faithfully ad-

hered till, on his death-bed, he praised God that by acting according to it he had given in charity more than forty thousand dollars:

"By the grace of God, I will never be worth more than \$50,000.

"By the grace of God, I will give one-fourth of the net profits of my business to charitable and religious uses.

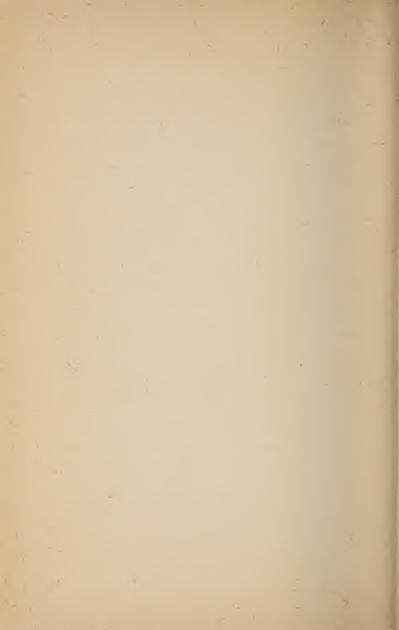
"If I am ever worth \$20,000 I will give one-half of my net profits; and if I am ever worth \$30,000 I will give three-fourths; and the whole after \$50,000. So help me God, or give to a more faithful steward, and set me aside.

"N. R. Cobb."

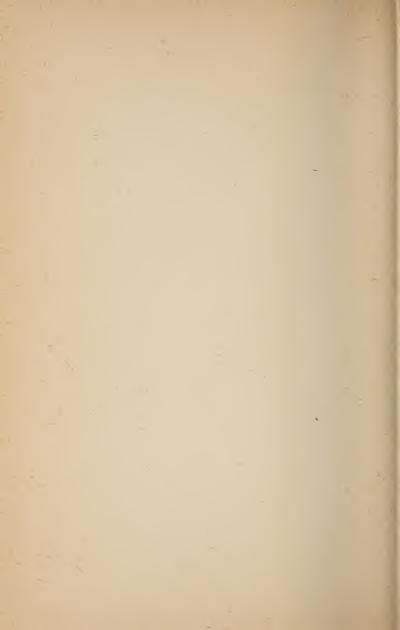
Reader make up your mind before God, in the light of his truth, what your whole duty is in this important matter, and then fearlessly do it. You have nothing to lose but every thing to gain by such a course. "Take heed and beware of coveteousness."

Systematic beneficence carries Christ as a sanctifying personality into the counting-room and the workshop, and makes him an actual partner in business, sweetening all toil and care, and enriching the soul with his daily benediction.

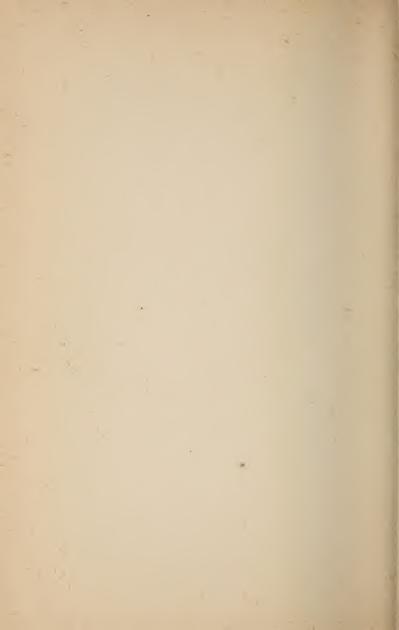
In nature there is the strictest economy. Every resource is utilized, every force is wisely directed, until she comes to blossoms and fruitage, and then she is absolutely profligate of blessings and benefits all for us. Let us thus be honest, industrious, frugal, saving, that these may "abound unto the riches of our liberality" towards God.













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